The WIDOW'S HOUSE

KATHLEEN COYLE

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A Novel

BY

KATHLEEN COYLE

Author of "Piccadilly"

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THE WIDOW'S HOUSE

CHAPTER I

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THE house was very still and cold, for she had slacked down the kitchen fire and shut up the stove face so that it presented nothing but shining blackness. The room was full of morning shade. Over the top of the muslin window-blind she could see that the outside air was bright with pale October sunlight. The brightness hung over the checker-board of back-yards, lingeringly, vaguely, mute as the breath of a promise. She stood idly, watching it, her blackened hands held away from her clean apron. In one of them she still held the tin of new blacklead that resembled boot-polish. Beyond the yards and the separating lane, rising above the roofs of the opposite cottages, were the tapering masts of the fishing-boats that had come while she slept. They were swaying almost imperceptibly with the wash of the Fleet; swaying above the cottage roofs like magnified reeds in the bright pale atmosphere. They reminded her—for ever and ever she thought whatever should lie out there would serve to remind her—of the man who would never come again, never again cross her threshold with that mood of eager mystery that always dyed their greeting, and turn, as she closed the door, with that queer trembling expectation and cruciform sweep of his arms that

52036

always humbled her because it made her marvel at his weakness within the power of her presence. But when his embrace closed over her, when he held her so close that her breasts hurt, she knew the strength that was there—behind the mask of his weakness. At that moment her tenderness changed to fear, and she clung to him, not caring how hard he crushed her so long as he made her confident of his support—the cross upon which her passionate will was hung. The charged moments sped from her senses until she began to realize that her fore-plans of meeting, her dreams, emptied the event itself of half its wonder. And by the time she unclosed her eyes to encounter the deep gaze of his, her heart would already be unquiet, anguished by its own special hunger for Paradise. His face, in the revelation of this moment, was always more a challenge than an assuagement. It seemed so to chase her back into herself, into her difference from *him*. For written upon it, fresh at the end of every voyage, were traces of things which for him were vital and imaged, which for her were invisible and unknown. She wondered if marriage meant this for all women—a tearing of the heart upon the very hearthstone of consummation. He became, then, a stranger from another world who had the right, according to a far-away and insignificant arrangement in the plain every-day world, to descend upon the home of her life and claim all its secrecies. The claim was doomed to disappoint-

ment because the miraculous martyrdom of their difference remained. Occasionally she questioned if it remained for him, and was certain. She knew there were whole tracts in his mind where a thought of her never entered. She had her own tracts . . . but even those that had nothing at all to do with him were darkened impalpably by his shadow.

The darkness had but deepened by his not coming back. She could never think of him as dead. She had never seen him otherwise than warm and living. No funeral steps had ever gone up and down this quiet place that was her home. He had been washed overboard in the Dogger. And the Dogger was, for her, a deep watery forest thickly populated by fishes with queer tribal ways. His bones would be washed there to strange beauty....

He had brought her a young lamprey once, in a lemonade bottle. She smiled out of the desolation of her thoughts, to think how childishly she had begged him to take it to the same spot and throw it back into the sea whence he had taken it. She could not bear to see the lithe, restless thing in prison; it was worse than a wild-bird in a cage, its dumb efforts wrung her heart. She loved the laughter with which he had greeted her notion, and the happy tormenting mood that rose in him and made him tease her about the "lamprey youngster." He obeyed her wish with all a sailor's honor. She liked to imagine now, that, because of that act of his, done at her bidding,

some sea-creatures would be kind to his body in the fathoms of the Dogger—swim gently, in and out, as if they were in a temple.

But, although she could never bring herself to a full realization of his death, she no longer cheated herself into forgetting that he had ceased to come. His absence had been gradually bereft of promise, and every dream she attempted to pour into it discovered a leak and ran from her mind like water. Soon no dream would come.

Impatiently she turned away from the scene framed by the upper panes of the window, turned away from the wish that would no longer hold for her, and went into the scullery. She laid the black-lead on the shelf and began to wash her hands. She felt like a ghost of the woman who had been Harry Capgrave's wife washing away the stains of monotonous duty in a house so silent that you would never guess the fine love that had once kindled and leapt in it. She was startled by a knock at the door, hammering into the stillness like the trumpet of an invader. "Now who can that be?" she thought. "It's neither butcher nor baker!" She wiped her hands quickly on the roller-towel and went down the passage. The recent thoughts about Harry rose like a plague in her mind. Supposing it should be he . . . come again! Often this wild expectation seized her, and frequent unfulfillment had not punished her out of its futility. She opened the door, the soul within her torn in two between desire and foreknowledge. It was a stranger, a young man with

such a foreign quality stamped upon him that, after one glance at him, her instincts on the moment impelled her to treat him as if he brought her news.

"You've a card in your window . . . apartments?" he stammered.

"Oh, that!" she exclaimed with a sort of damped scorn in her voice that stretched her meaning into: "If that's all you have to tell me, you may continue your journey!" She had forgotten. She gathered her wits into the sense of the occasion to answer him completely. "Yes, I have, but I'm not looking for a man-lodger. I've had a woman-teacher for years. She left to get married."

"I'm a teacher too."

"So," she said contemplatively. She felt as though her heart would split open with the blackness that overfilled it.

She seemed, to the young man, rather stupid. The way in which her head drooped back weighted the darkness of her hair and gave to her face a drained look. She was pallid. A plain middle-aged woman with large empty eyes and a thick neck.

"I do not wish for a man."

Her denial penetrated through his shyness. "But I'm a stranger to Lenne. . . . I don't know . . ." He broke off confused by the readiness with which her mouth broke over the whiteness of her teeth. He dreaded her laughter.

But she did not laugh. Her lips only half

opened. His confusion conquered her. "Where are you teaching?"

"At Bede House School. . . . I've only just come. One of the masters has had to leave . . . " He burst into a plea, driven by the terror of encounters with other landladies: "Couldn't you take me temporarily? It would give me time to look round!"

She considered. She hated the idea, but it was foolish to go on dipping into the insurance-money. The room had been vacant for weeks—since the beginning of the summer holidays. And teachers, Harry said, were a quiet breed of people. He had looked away from her and was staring up to where the street widened at its crest to Merchant Square. She liked his looks. He had the same straight features and kind of eager gentleness as the Norman, Eugene Parlet, in Saint Dukas' Lady Chapel, whose face she knew by heart, for she traced it every Sunday out of the Peacock brass in the wall at the end of the seat she always occupied. The resemblance made him familiar, quickened him in her mind. She invited him to come in almost with welcome, although her words were bare upon the warmth of her manner. "You can have a look at the room!"

Murmuringly he stepped up to her level and passed her, standing shyly, with his hat in his hand, against the wall in the narrow passage. She shut the door and darted to the stairs.

"It's all ready," she assured him over her shoulder.

He followed without a word. His eyes were concentrated upon her broad back in its black poplin blouse, with the white tape at her waist which showed above her apron-strings. She was wearing the old pepper-and-salt skirt that she kept for mornings, and a pair of Harry's plaited felt slippers that were too large for her, so that, when she raised her feet, they dropped away from her heels.

"There!" she exclaimed upon the landing, and made a movement of display with her hands.

He avoided her eyes. He saw a blurred bedroom that crystallized out upon a text: "They that go down to the sea in ships . . ." "It will do perfectly."

"You're bent on taking it!"

She seemed to be teasing him about it. "If you please!" he said firmly.

All down the stairs her slow, deep voice troubled him with details. "Fifteen shillings a week, board and lodging and attendance . . . and the use of the parlor . . ." She brushed against him as she opened a door. "Does that suit you?"

"Perfectly." He seemed confined to one word.

"Well, then, you can stay until you're suited!"

"Thank you." He was so relieved that he had an odd feeling as if—as if he ought to forgive her for something.

"You can use this room as much as you like. I hardly ever use it." She was waiting for him to go in.

He entered. The itch of uneasiness returned upon him. "It . . . it is very kind of you."

"It's no kindness at all." She laughed huskily as if her reason stuck in her throat. "I don't like it!"

"Don't like it," he repeated foolishly, and gave the place the swift candor of his inspection as if he sought in it the proofs of its obnoxiousness. It was, perhaps, the cleanest place he had ever seen. Its spotlessness was polished by the morning sunlight pouring through window-panes that were not like glass at all, but shining clearnesses in space. Trepidation possessed him. "I hope . . . I'm afraid I'm rather an untidy person . . . my books get all over the place." He thought it very generous of her to say that it didn't matter, and to add that "a man must use his tools." If he had looked at her when she said that, he would have seen that her dark pupils were contracted, so that her eyes were no longer gray, but slits of blackness —as if darkness were a shield.

She stood, after she had shut the street door upon him, smiling whimsically. What a timid boy he was, to be sure! Not much over twenty, she reckoned, and far too thin for his height. She'd have to be careful with his food. . . . But she was relieved that the room was let. Instead of closing the parlor door and going straight back to the kitchen, she put her hand up to the frame and gave the room a long look. She sighed, and

her head fell back with that movement that tilted up her chin and exposed the sturdiness of her throat. There was not a single thing in the room that did not mock at her with its association with Harry. On the table by the window were the four bottle-green jars, with the red seaweed standing up in them like trees, that he had brought her from Formosa. They made her window different from every window in the street, and were plainly visible, between her saffron curtains, to passers-by. Sometimes, when the fire was lit, and a winter evening drawing to a close, the home-coming school children would gather in a bunch to marvel at the wonder and the beauty lit by the inner rays of the firelight. More than once she had waited to light the lamp, because she had not the heart to pull down the blind upon their hungry eyes. At one time or another Harry had brought some one of them in and shown him the treasures. The boys loved him like a hero. It was a pity they never had any children of their own . . . yes, from the glazier shells in the fender to the model of the drifter *Susan,* in which he had first set sail, and the cedar-framed post-cards on the mantelpiece, everything reminded her of Harry! And the things that were not wholly his were things that they had bought together. The very last thing they had bought, in the Saturday-night market in Merchant Square, was the fringed cloth on the table, that was blue when you looked at it from the door, and red when you looked at it

from the window, patterned by checks that had an erratic share of the contrariness. She leaned her cheek against her bare forearm—she had forgotten to pull down her sleeves when the knock came—and many things came back to her . . . at the beginning, long ago, she hated those long voyages that took him away from her with a wrench and gave him back to her with a possession that hurt her equally. The joy of his return was always anguished by some accumulated mastery in him that whipped into the control of her life, and which her spirit always resented, because, though steeped in love, in some inexplicable way it left her at his mercy . . . it made her feel that he was skilled in the management of women. And she was never able, clearly, to convey to him that she did not wish to be managed. Her love for him was greater than this power that was so easily evoked in him. It was a free gift of her own. He never seemed to comprehend that in the periods of separation she had her own world to inhabit—and govern, and that there was no need to pity her because she was always to be found where he had left her. . . . Even his laughter was fringed with a sense of the things she missed! And yet, when he tried to tell her about those things, he always failed, fell short of her own vision. Whatever she knew of foreign places was gathered mostly from stray glimpses of plates in travel-books on the second-hand stalls, and occasional magazines . . . and the scent of his souvenirs—until the cinema came! And the

cinema but justified her independence. It convinced her that she could hold her own—that she had her own dominion. Distrust, fear that was poignant as a knife in the dark, crumbled up like something she could roll between her fingers and fling to hungry birds, when she became familiar with the images of foreign women who were either brazen to the point of madness, or burdened with a slavishness that made their eyes wells of meekness. As for foreign places! Why, the town of Lenne, where she had lived all her life, had its outstanding values. She would rather see some of the post-cards of East Anglia on the pictures any day, than some of the world's show-places which were horribly over-rated—India, for instance, with those vast patches of scrubble-land that nobody in their senses could compare with the links over the sea at Hunton on a clear day when one could see the Risings valley.

The secret was, perhaps, that although these voyages never took him wholly out of her life, they took him so completely into a special life of his own that only his image remained for her. And his image was clouded by his absorption in affairs which slackened her ardent hold upon him. Instead of looking into the mirror that her thoughts shrined, he was looking away—to immediate experiences and adventures. Only while he slept was she sure of him! That was why she always tried to keep count of his night-watches. When she knew him to be asleep, she would not sleep, but keep awake to pour out the torrent of

her guarding thoughts, her prayers, her spiritual protection. It turned the night into a chapel where she found him—and bore him bright untarnished company.

But she always trusted him. For he always came back to her, and he was always hers when he came back. She was quite certain he gave this enduring fidelity to no other woman. She was content. Her common sense told her that it would have been utterly foolish to expect more. And to demand it would have been a human unkindness. . . . All the same, she was glad when he came off the steamships. No seaman's savings had ever been better spent than his when he bought a quarter share in one of the Lenne smacks. The voyages shrank then from months to days. The time in which she lost him diminished. Between her and the seas he trawled there could not be, she believed, any allurement that could shut a door upon all she meant to him. She did not mind that there should be a tune in his heart behind her back. But a tune that beguiled his faithfulness was a sort of taunt . . . she took her hand down from the doorway and pressed it flat against her bosom. She had made a grave mistake. . . . There was something about a sailing-boat that led a man astray, something that bewitched him, something that had more secrecy about it than a woman—that could not be got at. . . . That very first time! They were overdue. It was a Lammas day, sodden with rain, the sky heavy with unthundered lead. She had not

gone down with the other women to watch for the *Hicafric* on the flats. She was so used to waiting for him at home that she could not bear to go out where her anxiety and expectation would be exposed. She kept the fire made up and the kettle on the boil and the meat-pie ready to shove into the oven; listening, from sheer force of habit, to the train-whistles, although she knew quite well that he was not coming from the railway any more. The day ebbed into an opaque mist that made the sky seem light, and reminded her of the cooty birds on the Hunton shore vanishing in the dusk. She had barely pulled down the blind upon the window of her vigil when she heard his steps coming down the street. She hurried out and slipped the latch on the front door, and ran to put the pie in the oven. She was so quick, with the heart nearly thumping out of her body, that she banged the oven door on her finger. It took her several seconds to open it again. She sat down on her heels, nearly swooning with the pain in her finger and the wildness of her heart-beats . . . she stood up when he spoke. "O Harry!" she cried. He was in his oilskins, wet from head to foot. She never minded the wetness. The smell of the sea filled her as he pulled her against him. She never wanted him to let her go . . . there was the wet stain of his pressure all down her clean apron . . . when she looked at his face with the lamplight shining up to it there was a strangeness upon it, a wild ecstasy—newly impressed, as if he had been looking into the eyes

of some conquest that was holier and cleaner than any human love. It was like a hoar-frost upon his countenance, freshly fallen. He could not move his lips or eyes without shaking it into the atmosphere. But he gave her no more of his secret than the consecrated saints give when they smile down upon your prayers from heaven. "It's been rough . . . seas like mountains!" he said, as he tossed his sou-wester into the space beside the dresser. She remembered saying, "You look as if you'd been walking on the Risings!" But he only stared at her as though the land held no comparison for his adventure.

She always knew that look upon his face again, and knew that, wherever it took him, it was a place where not even the ghost of herself had any power to be.

How silly she was to be wasting time like this, with sheets to air and all sorts of things to be done before her new lodger came in! She went into the room and wiped with her fist the case that held the drifter *Susan*. The dampness of autumn had put a bloom on the glass. The room would be better for a fire in it. She stooped over the fender and took the red and white paper shavings out of the grate. . . .

And when she had lit it she sat on her heels watching the kindling-wood catch and the flames lick their way into the heart of the coal. It would be a real welcome for him, and no mistake. His name was Stephen Host; he had written it down for her on the torn back of an envelope. He

would be a quiet creature about the house, she felt sure, not in the least like Miss Mundesley, who used to run up and down stairs as though she had to do it for her living; whose hockey sticks and tennis racquets were always all over the place, and who was always washing out a jumper or a pair of stockings. There was a splutter and a spark shot into the hearth-rug. She picked the hot ember up quickly between her finger and thumb, and examined the rug to make sure that it wasn't smoldering. Harry had made it going out to Brindisi . . . it was just like the real sheepskin she had always wanted. She liked it so much that he began to make her another—and never finished it. The crimson wool and the partly worked canvas were upstairs in the hamper. It was the only thing he had left unfinished. It had lain about the house for months wrapped in a piece of unbleached calico; first in one room and then in another—under the sofa, on the chairs, in the corners—until she had been sick of the sight of it. And now its poor incompletion made her heart ache every time she remembered it. It seemed, too, as if it would be wrong to finish it, because the hands that had begun it were lying, picked to the bone, washed to strange whiteness, in the depths of the Dogger. He had strong hands, a sailor's hands, with golden brown hairs running down the backs; the inside skin was welted where the ropes caught . . . often, times without number, they had cupped her face to meet the laughter and the love in his. . . .

She was undoubtedly glad, the more she thought about it, that the young man was coming. What a fool she would have been to persist in her refusal—just because she had made up her mind to have a woman! But she was amazed, nevertheless, when he arrived, at the shock the event gave her. She was standing in the hall by the trunk which, he had told her, contained his books. He had run up to the bedroom with the bag which, presumably, contained his clothes, and the sound of his feet in the room above filled her with resentment. She could not have explained it to anybody, she could hardly explain it to herself, but she hated him for being there—in possession. She wished she had taken a woman after all, and resolved to remind him to look out for another room as soon as possible.

He had asked her permission to unpack his books in the hall. He fumbled so much with the rope that tied the box that she had to help him. Thanks to Harry, she was a great hand at a rope. She could tell by his expression that he thought a lot of his books. Poor things, they were, she thought, what she saw of them on the surface. Little gray slips of books with the oddest titles: *Le Cid,* and *Fontaine's Fables,* and one, that she had picked up when it fell from the pile he had made on the floor, *Fabulae Faciles.* She couldn't make head or tail of them. When he came to the larger ones, he began to look into them as he handled them. By the way his lips moved, once she thought he was going to read something out

to her that she would be certain not to understand. "When you've finished," she remarked, "I'll bring you your tea." She left him and went into the safety of the kitchen. The ruddiness of the sunset was lying over the yards, filling them with the image of shining gold that had been held up to a conflagration. The still, burning light made the crumbling wall opposite look like something that ought to have been crusted with precious stones. The masts were still there—golden needles now, threaded with the wonder of the sky . . . the girl next door broke the spell for her. She was a bold girl with frizzy hair, that she kept in curling-pins for half the day. She never came out except to dump something into the ash-bin to the accompaniment of a rag-time air. It was always the same air, and she never heard more of it than—"When the moon shines upon the cowshed." The girl's voice laid such stress upon the "moon," and the "cow," that wasn't a cow at all, but a shed, that the other syllables became ripples in the phrase into which the moon and cow were flung. She had heard it so often that she had really come to see a moon shining like aluminum upon the felted roof of a derelict cowshed. She couldn't sing herself—only hum. But even if she had had a voice, she was convinced that she would have tested it very severely before inflicting it upon her neighbors. But she loved saying things—lovely words and lines—over and over again to herself. It was Miss Hermione who had taught her to do that, by

showing her the loveliness . . . so long ago, yet it remained, and would remain fresh as new paint in her mind. A message had come down for her father from the Hall, just after the dinner-hour, and she had gone out to look for him to give it to him. The aconites shone like pale stars under the trees as she went up the avenue. He was not in the hot-house—where the scent of the hyacinths frightened her, like a holy feeling, and where she stayed longer than she ought because she could not tear her eyes away from the blue perfect blossoms standing up in the terra-cotta pots in a way that made her think of quiet lovely laughter coming from a plain person. But she ran away at last, and standing up on one of the asparagus frames, she saw him through a hole in the juniper hedge, bent over one of the flower-beds on the lawn. It was when she was running across to him that Miss Hermione spied her from a window and rang the little tinkly bell that she kept for summoning the servants. She looked round when she heard the bell, not thinking that it was meant for her, and saw that Miss Hermione was beckoning to her. She wanted to run —on to her father. But it was too late to pretend that she did not know she was wanted, so she smothered her shyness and walked straight to the window, keeping her shoulders well back, because Miss Hermione had once told her to do so. Miss Hermione was waiting for her in the great hall, that was like a church with furniture in it. She said at once: "Well, Annie, what a tall girl

you are growing. Were you late with your father's dinner?"

"No, miss," she had answered. "He was out before your message came."

"Well, I want you to tell him to come to me at once about the begonias?"

She was going then, but Miss Hermione laughed, and she saw that she was holding a thin, gold-edged book in her hand, with her forefinger keeping a place in it. "I was reading this when I saw you flying like a bird past the window. I thought you would like to hear it!"

She was dreadfully uncomfortable, but rooted. And the thought came into her head that it was quite true what they said—that Miss Hermione was cracked, and that that was why the Welpoles all lived abroad. "Listen!" Miss Hermione said, and began to read. She was too confused to listen clearly at the beginning . . . something about a mayor. But when Miss Hermione said, "Play uppe, play uppe, O Boston bells!" she discovered it was about a place she knew, for she had been to Boston with her mother on a day in the blazing hot summer before she died, and she remembered the market there, and the blue pens packed with soft-eyed sheep who roused her pity. "Play all your changes, all your swells, play uppe the Brides of Enderby. . . . Men say it was a stolen tyde. . . ." She listened then with all her mind and ears, making her consciousness like wax to take, and keep, the imprint of words that were a sort of magic in her blood. . . . "Where the reedy

Lindis floweth . . . from the reeds where melick groweth . . . faintly came the milking song . . . leave your meadow grasses mellow, quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow, quit the stacks of parsley hollow . . . again I hear the Lindis flow, swift as an arrow, sharpe and strong." On, on it went, "within the sunset's golden breath," beating over and over between the "Brides of Mavis Enderby" and "my sonne's wife Elizabeth" . . . "for fairer woman ne'er was seen." She saw the "stolen tyde" coming down upon the ships "ashore beyond the scorpe," and gaining, gaining until "the boats sailed up the market-place," and the dawn brought Elizabeth and her children "downe drifted to her dwelling-place," a cold Elizabeth whose voice would never be raised again, "cusha! cusha! cusha!" calling to the cows at milking-time.

Miss Hermione asked her if she liked it, and she remembered looking away from the tall, red-haired woman to the purply blue and green marbles cast upon the floor from the windows before she answered that "it was a great pity for Elizabeth." Miss Hermione looked upwards to the windows when she said that, and the rays of light made her face into a stained-glass saint's. She had the look of a saint, with the little book held up against her breast, and the motley color coming out all over her. She lost her fear of Miss Hermione in that moment. For something had happened between them that was like a grasp under the tangle of their differences. So young

she was that the touch sprang love from her as if it were a divining-rod. And when Miss Hermione said that she would copy out the poem for her, the look she gave her in gratitude had the quality of worship. She had the copy still. But she knew the words by heart. During one of Harry's long absences she had come across the verses in a little volume of school poetry. Its price was only threepence, because of the ink-stains . . . it was upstairs in her bedroom, on the chest of drawers, beside her Testament.

When she went into the parlor, Mr. Host was standing by the window with a look of embarrassment upon him, as if he had been examining the things in the room. It was small wonder for him to do that, for they were not common things. But she did not let on that she knew quite well what he had been up to. "Bring a chair over and sit down," she said as kindly as she could as she pushed the geranium out of the center of the table and spread the cloth.

He chose a chair, as she told him, but he did not sit down. "Your name," he was stammering. "I do not know your name."

She paused with the butter-cooler in her hand.

"I ought to have told you—Mrs. Capgrave . . . Mrs. Capgrave."

"Capgrave," he repeated, "that's an old name!"

"I know it is," she said proudly. "You must take a look into one of those Lenne guide-books." She pointed to the row of books on the top of the

low wall-cupboard. "There's a Capgrave there as set sail in the whaler *Plenty* a hundred years ago."

His eyebrows went up. In a stride he was beside the books. He rested his hand on the cupboard and stooped to choose the book she mentioned. His eyelids fell like white, dark-edged stamps upon the eagerness of his eyes. *"A Chronological History of the Voyages and Discoveries in the South Seas or Pacific Ocean,"* he read out, "by Captain James Burney."

"Oh, don't!" she cried, as he took it out. She had seen that old tattered volume—volume two, it was—so often in Harry's hands, that to see it in a stranger's was sacrilege to the man she could not quite believe to be dead. . . . Mr. Host was staring at her. He had withdrawn his hand from the book. She was standing very still with her hand pressed against her side. The look between them changed from amazement on his part and resentment on hers to pure foolishness. The moment welled with ridicule. It was almost comic, the way she said, as if she had caught him with his hand in the meat-safe eating the dumplings that had been left over from the dinner, "You mustn't do that!"

"But you told me . . ." he began, and broke off as if the occasion were outside the pale of common logic.

"Oh, I'm fair silly!" she said roughly. "I've had the house to myself so long that I can't bear a thing to be moved . . . you mustn't mind me . . . it'll do the books good to be read. Sit

down now and make a good tea. I've boiled you an egg." She tried to smile at him, but he had a stiff, young air upon him as he took his place.

And, outside in the kitchen, she hated him again—as one hates a person who gets in one's way in the traffic. It was simply, she reasoned, that he interfered with the wonderful memories of Harry. He disturbed her peace . . . shook her from the thoughts that had been her sole companions in the quiet, lonely house. Her mind was like those brown ants that torture their trespassers, so that no creature could come upon their territory without being stung. Ants have their own laws . . . she would have to be careful, for if she gave in to this dreadful irritation at the touch of strangers, no lodger would stay with her. She would have to master her behavior. She could not subsist without them. But she was glad she had given him a nice tea. It would make up for her rudeness.

Nevertheless, she could not restrain herself from hoping that he was leaving the books alone. It occurred to her that it would be a good plan if she brought Harry's books into the kitchen and kept them on the dresser. It would leave room for Mr. Host's books. He would be bound to like some of his books in the parlor. She would suggest it to him when she went in to clear away. Harry's grandfather had given him that Burney book when he was a little boy. It had been the source of his resolution to go to sea—though, being a Capgrave, he had the thirst in his blood.

And when he went to the Eleusinian Islands it was a granted wish to him . . . she could never have stood those native customs herself. The stories he told her! Women who chewed up the nuts they put in your salad—although she supposed that there might not be much to choose between barbaric fingers and barbaric teeth! But it was positively horrible, and the fact that only the younger women were allowed to do it in no way modified the horror, even if their teeth were as wonderful as Harry said they were. It might be that the whiteness was exaggerated by their dark complexions. She didn't envy them. And she could quite understand their inability to cook, for to live on what was no better than a sand-hill in the middle of the ocean could in no way foster domesticity, or thrift. She could almost understand the terror that would overcome them when a storm rose, and their starved-looking palm-trees wagged like the plumes on a hearse. But she was glad that Harry had gone where he always wanted. It put an end to it. Men were like that, always hankering after an adventure and grumbling at the taste of it when they got it. . . . She went to the bread-crock and took out the stale Hovis that she meant to toast for her own tea.

The parlor was empty when she went in to clear away. She picked up the tray from the floor at the end of the sofa where she had left it, and put it down on the table. She could not resist a quick glance at the books to see if they had been

moved. They looked so patient, sitting there with something of the air of a stuffed terrier that one has loved when it was alive, that she moved towards them, a low, fondling moan breaking through her lips. She would take them right away at once. They were Harry's. . . .

She had forgotten to light the lamp in the hall. The daylight had suddenly dropped, and her thoughts were so preoccupied that she did not see Mr. Host coming down the stairs until he was close upon her on the mat outside the kitchen door. Their eyes met like a challenge, shielded by the dusk. Gradually a smile moved across the shaven part of his face and spread around his closed lips. It said as clearly as any speech that he was not the thief she took him for, and then it twisted into contempt for the meanness of her suspicion. She was vexed to muteness. Pushing the kitchen door open with her foot, she marched past him with her chin rammed down on the burden of books in her arms. She laid them down quickly, and went straight back to the parlor. He was standing on the hearth-rug with his back to her. She put the things on the tray slowly, hoping he would turn. It wasn't easy to talk to his back. She shook the crumbs from the cloth into the tray before she folded it. "I thought," she said, and raised her voice and spoke very clearly, "that you'd like to have some of your own books down here. I've cleared a space for them."

He swung round. "Thank you," he said very conventionally, "I should like to."

His manner arraigned and tormented her. He had not been in the house an hour, and already he was stumbling upon her heart's secrecies with a blame that was born in trespass. The truth she could not bear to see distorted drove her to the issue. She pointed to the bare shelf. "I've taken them away . . . they were my husband's books . . . he set great store on them, and now . . . now they are more precious to me than gold." She felt her face whiten as she thought that he would refer to Harry as dead. He might ask, and what would she answer? He could not be dead in the ordinary mortal sense of dying, for she had never seen him otherwise than warm and living.

But all that Mr. Host said with the profound sincerity of his youth was, "I am sorry."

The note of true pity in his voice was like rain upon her parched soul. Her head drooped back, her eyes narrowed; then swiftly, as if she were a fool to have forgotten, she picked up the tray and went out of the room.

The sympathy stayed on Stephen Host's face . . . husband drowned at sea, he commented to himself, poor devil! But he could understand Mrs. Capgrave's emotion, for the love he bore his invalid mother had schooled him in these perceptions. And the white corpse of his father floated an instant in his vision and vanished. It was the living who endured. His childhood seemed crammed into one moment, and crowned with grief upon the consciousness of his mother's

desolation . . . early morning . . . her sitting there in a room stricken with shadows, still as a ghost . . . only her hands moved—plucked at the sheet. It was if a gate had opened and shut, and more than the breath out of his father's body had passed through there and would never come again. . . . He sat down at the table and pulled the writing-pad, for which he had gone upstairs, across to him. He took out his fountain-pen and wrote at the top of the paper, "C/o Mrs. Capgrave, 9, Fleetway Street, Lenne. . . ."

He had not dared to believe, when he advertised for a mastership in Lenne, that it would really come to him. It was the greatest luck in the world. It was so near to his Rising home that he would be within reach if his mother's illness took a sudden turn. But, above everything, it seemed to him a clear proof that he was really meant to continue his father's investigations into the Roman foundation. At times he wasn't at all certain . . . it was his mother who had poured the idea out upon him . . . saturating his will. She lifted the suggestion, like a wreath, from his father's death-bed, and set it upon his brows. There were times when his brows ached . . . it had to be got through—like his degree. But he imagined there would be aims on the other side of it. Dr. Pledge had been extremely interested about the book that his father had left unfinished, and which he had promised to complete; he had been extremely interested in the fact that he was the son of the East Anglian archæologist. . . .

In the morning, when the train stopped at Lenne, he had had the oddest depression—as if something in the scheme of his life had been pricked like a bubble and emptied of elation. The sight of the newly painted gates of the level crossing, as he came up the incline from the station, had made him feel that the ugly vitality of modern traffic was a sort of sign of the inherent failure of his promise. The town looked mildewed with ugliness, spreading out like a scattered slag-heap from its original deposit. What he saw of it then, on the surface, was a declaration that the visible meanness of the modern occupants would frustrate forever the power of mind to rekindle this place with the ancient Roman quality . . . the old Western Road that was made by heroic men in bondage bore men to-day who were slaves in their freedom; men whose eyes held no vision worth the fastening either of what had gone before or of what was to come. The talk with Dr. Pledge had wiped away this mood. When he stood with him in the old gazebo tower of his house in Merchant Square, the "promise" had come back to him, resplendent as in a dream, repossessing him with the heritage of his father's passion. One had but to look to know that the town was Roman. It did not matter if the market-place was seventeenth-century, the space upon which it stood must have been originally defined by the Prætorium. . . . And looking across the reclaimed marshes, along the docks to the Fairfleet, he could imagine men of the Fourteenth Le-

gion—Gemina men—with bent bodies, driving stakes into the tree-logged marsh or binding the boats in a pontoon . . . he could imagine the sun going down for the Icenii with some new tyranny of Suetonius writ large upon its angers.

He brought his mind in from these things to write the letter to his mother. What he really told her was about the school, and how the fixed, staring faces of his future pupils had terrified him out of all courage. But he would, he reassured her, persevere. The thought of how she had stinted herself for years to enable him to graduate was a perpetual stimulus to his best efforts. Yes, he meant to go through with the task that had been set him—almost as if his parents had begotten him for its fulfilment—to the finish! He told her, too, about the clean and comfortable diggings he had found, and how he hoped that they would not remain temporary, and that Mrs. Capgrave would allow him to stay. He thought of the fragile form of his mother as he had left her, propped up with pillows in a chair so large for her that she had the appearance of being drowned in it. And he remembered how light she was; she grew lighter every day, as he carried her downstairs—so stiff, almost frozen with the death that had already come to part of her body . . . but her eyes were alive, burning with the full force of the life that remained into an activity that increased their mere power of seeing so that she could read the soul behind the outer mask of one's face. He would never be able to keep any secret

from her. He was certain that there would never be any secret that he would be ashamed to show her. But in a remote corner of his intentions towards life he was afraid, now and then, of his capacity to fulfil his word to his father. . . . After to-day's endowment of inspiration, he thought that that fear could not grow to any height within him. There had blossomed, as he stood in the sunlit gazebo, a new fiery fidelity to his father's desire. The beauty—the hard suffering that bore such lovely fruits, the martyrdom of early-hearted men came back . . . it was like religion! He found himself thanking Heaven that the conquest had been born in Rome, for, springing from that passionate discipline of Italian growth, it had but bowed men to build—not perish. The Saracens, the Moors, were not like that. They had blazed out in daily angers until the pile of their victories was reached—and ended. . . .

He finished his mother's letter with a sentence of endearment that conveyed to her, as she read it, a strange sense of having him again in her arms, as he was, long ago, before the mind in his body had any notion of where it was going.

And on the other side of the wall Annie Capgrave's head was bowed on her folded arms on the kitchen table, and she was crying! They were the first tears she had shed since Sam Couranna, of the *Hicafric,* had told her about Harry. They were hot tears, scalding down her face and leaving a salt taste upon her lips. They had broken

from her eyes as she shut the kitchen door and stood, clinching her hands against her breast, wondering what new grief had come to her. . . .

Mr. Host's knock roused her. She raised her head instantly. The mark of her wet cheek was plain to be seen upon her forearm. And when she raised her hand she felt her hair matted against her cheek. "Don't come in!" she cried out. "I'll be out in a minute." Her voice sounded as though she were in a temper.

"Right you are!"

She heard him go back to the parlor before she stood up. Her head felt light and her temples throbbed. For a second, she stood, half her weight resting on her fist on the table. And then dragging her feet along, she went out to the sink and splashed her face with the icy-cold water.

It vexed her exceedingly to see that she had forgotten to light the lamp in the hall after all. Without hesitation she put her hand up to it and brought it back to the kitchen where she put it down on an old newspaper and took off the chimney. It was a blue china hand-lamp with a spray of lilies-of-the-valley designed on the bowl. The burner was one of those four-pronged affairs. She turned up the wick and plucked off the charred edge before she lit it. The flame gathered slowly at first and then flared into points at the corners. She leaned forward to adjust it, and, as she put on the globe, the upward disc of light revealed the sorrowful patience of her expression. The darkened lids of her eyes were like medals

weighted upon exhaustion. She carried the lamp out to its fretwork bracket that hung above the painted drain-pipe which held the ancient ash-plant that had been her father's.

Mr. Host's requirement was very reasonable. "I'm going out . . . to the post. I wondered if I could have a latch-key?"

"Why, of course, you can have Miss Mundesley's . . . it's up in her room." He offered to get it, when he knew that Miss Mundesley's was his room, but she insisted upon getting it herself —she knew exactly where to find it in the dark. The ease with which he had taken to running about her house disturbed her again, but she controlled her animosity before her return. "What would you like for your supper?" she asked, and could not help smiling at the perplexity that came upon him. She believed that if she had asked him there and then to tell her what he was in the habit of having, he would not have been able to tell her. When she suggested "cocoa," he seized upon the word like a rescue. "I've some cold corned-beef. You can have a slice or two of that if you'd like."

"It would be very nice indeed."

"About nine o'clock?" she asked.

He looked at his wrist-watch. "I was thinking of taking a look round." He thought of the map in his pocket and the walks he had planned.

The furtive way in which he regarded her convinced her that he was unanswerable for his punctuality. He was the wandering sort. . . . She

used to be like that herself—when she was his age. Nothing had delighted her more than to follow the wind over the croppy fields, or give in to the lure of the tree that was always beyond the one at which she had resolved to turn back. . . . But she had been well-trained by duty into a respect for time. She hated it at first, and then rendered it obedience that made a rite of its performance and turned punctuality into a prayer. Besides, apart from her own harmonies which he had no right to displace just because he was going to pay her fifteen shillings every week, she could not have the inquisitiveness of her neighbors, which she dreaded, gratified by the banging of her front door at all hours of the night. "I'll lay it all ready," she said firmly, "and I shan't make the cocoa until you come in. I'd like you to be in by ten o'clock, as I want to bolt up the place before I go to bed."

He appeared to test her flexibility before he promised to be in by ten. And, to impress him further with the need for regularity, she asked him what time he would like his breakfast and dinner.

"Oh, breakfast at eight, I should say, and dinner round about one o'clock." Her next question made him think that she was persisting too far, even for a landlady.

"What time will you be leaving the schoolhouse at the lunch-hour?"

"Twelve-fifty-five," he said sharply, remembering the time on the schedule.

"So!" she remarked calculatingly. "Then you ought to be here easy by five-past!" She met the rebuking challenge in his eyes, fair and square. "I'm a real punctual person," she explained. "I don't like good food spoiled. I like things done to a turn, and I know exactly to a tick how long they take."

Instead of being angry, as he looked, he twisted his interpretation into cynical amusement and smiled. She had a veritable ardor over this business of creating meals. He almost admired her for it . . . but he hoped she wasn't going to be a nuisance. He laughed. "I'll do my best to get in to time!"

"It's the best way," she affirmed. "Slackness is no good to anybody!"

"I suppose not," he agreed carelessly, and picked up his letter.

She always remembered his profile as she saw it then, when he stooped over the table, and his head came between her and the light. The thick, dampish black hair was penciled out clearly upon his temple, making a figure five in the hollow above his high cheek-bones. The light drew the deep line along the edge of his forehead and down his straight nose, and dipped over the mouth and chin that reminded her of Eugene Parlet . . . his dark eagerness, his shy eagerness that was partly youth and partly some inhibited ambition . . . the eyes that flashed up at her were a landsman's eyes, inward-visioning—half afraid . . . a sailor never had eyes like that. . . .

CHAPTER II

SHE lay awake that night for a long time. The consciousness of another human presence in the house that nobody but she had inhabited for months troubled the darkness and pennoned a procession of bitter memories. She heard every sound in the next room. Whenever he moved the bed creaked, and, to complete the torture, he had left his window open, and in the storm that rose during the night she heard the wind buffeting his curtains, and imagined them blown out, balloon-like ghosts of curtains—swishing with a menacing whisper into the room. Once, something was blown off his dressing-table. She prayed that the noise would waken him and that he would be merciful enough to rise and shut the window. But he slept on. In future she would see that the window was well wedged before she went to bed.

The rain slashed against her own windows. She heard it pouring down the panes and being wind-washed from the sills. It reminded her of the tears that splashed from her eyes as she stood, choking for breath, inside the kitchen door. The storm was like the storm that broke in her heart . . . all through the summer her grief had been but ripening. What she had taken for peace—for proof that Harry's love still lived and was

about her—was just a slow ingathering of her desolation. And when the stone grew too heavy in the fruit of her grief, it fell into her empty hands. . . . The rain battered at the windows. The man in the next room turned in his sleep. The storm had come, ruthless upon the autumn pause. In the morning she would pity the bare trees, the stripped bare trees . . . she was like a tree with hope stripped from her and nothing to raise her eyes to but the wild burdened sky of winter. In the Potiphar copses the cones would be lying thick amidst the freshly fallen leaves; underneath them the ground would be dark and warm with the mold of other fallings. She would never again gather her apron full of them and come singing through the evergreens to the shaggily ivied gate-lodge where nothing but silence ever greeted her when she opened the door. She went for her rambles only when her father was at his work. And when he was at home she was always at home too. Harry had altered all that. He had broken into the stillness she hated with a love so all-possessing that it made her treasure the silence because of the quiet it gave her in which to think of him. She had not known at first. His laughter had confounded her. But it must have happened from the beginning . . . from the day she trudged into Lenne to buy a ring of dabs for her father's tea. The boats were anchored in the Fairfleet, and the fishermen were selling the surplus catch amidst a group of women and children on the flats, close down by the water.

The sky was streaky with sunset and the sunsetting lay pooled in the water, spreading and spreading until it held the anchored boats on its brim. The light that was like firelight fell on the people and burnished their faces. It showed the delight on the faces of the children, the ogling laughter on the mouths of the girls, the bargaining anxious faces of the older women. In contrast with the sharp tinny readiness of the landsfolk there was a dreaminess reflected in the strength of the seamen that fascinated her. The light seemed to shine through them and rest in them so that the liveliness of their laughter was lit by it and the tones of their voices were rounded off into the air like sounds beaten from shining clappers caught in the reflection. As she came towards them the breeze blew against her body and blew the hair from her face. She saw the fair man watching her. Very old, he seemed, almost as old as her father, with the fair curly beard that was crimped close under his cheekbones and along the clearly marked line of his jaws and chin. But when he smiled and she saw how white his teeth shone out of the curve of his lips, she knew that he was not old at all, but merely different from the others. She wished he wouldn't stare so hard at her, and looked away from him, but his eyes made her come back, and the laughter in them made her feel kind instead of angry towards him. There were fish-scales on his nose where he had wiped his face with his scaly hands. There were scales all down the front

of his blue ganzy shining like sequins in the sun. "And what do you want?" he had asked, with something in his manner as if she were Miss Hermione herself standing before him. "I'll give you a pick!"

"Dabs," she said, with an air of knowing what she had come for. He made her look into the creel. When she stooped, her hair tumbled forward over her shoulders. The white-bellied fish were lying wet and still in the bottom of the creel like newly washed, brightly marked crockery.

"Have these!" he said, and picked up several with the red-enameled spots showing in their brown-metaled backs. "They're about two-year-olds, and tender as your heart."

She looked up at him through the embarrassing curtain of her hair. How did he know she had a tender heart? But he was stringing his fish together and did not see. Her resentment of his verdict upon her tenderness swelled into indignation when he refused her pennies and offered her the fish as a gift. Two of the town girls were regarding her scornfully. It was impossible to argue with him before witnesses. She marched away from him, her head up, and her thoughts bursting with anger. He ran after her, holding out the flat red-spotted things. "Here you are . . . pay me what you like!"

"It isn't what I like, it's their price," she said firmly, determined to define the justice of her position.

"It is what you like," he went on stubbornly,

as if she were behaving with his terms like a tyrant. "Here," he held out his brown hand with the mother-of-pearly scales clustered all over it and making a bracelet round his wrist. She put the four pennies into it one by one until he said "market-price," and then she stopped and took the fish from him and left him. She never looked back, but she had a notion that the town girls were making a great mock of her behind her back.

The next day she put up her hair with the hairpins that had been her mother's. It was almost a desecration to take them out of the pocket of the old work-box where they had lain from the first day of her illness. Now, in the darkness, with the storm raging outside and the vexing presence of the strange young man in the next room, she could still see the japanned work-box with the flat silver faces of the Japanese women, resting on the shelf behind the print valance; she could smell the salty calico with the red campions patterned upon it. Beside the work-box were the seedsmen's catalogues that her father always kept to pore over through the long winter evenings. . . . Her father was angry because she had put up her hair. He said the change it made in her was like losing her, and then something that was like a slap in her face: "I suppose, like the rest of the girls, you'll be looking out for a young man now!" She met his anger with silence. If he thought wrongly of her, then words were useless and powerless to make him think

right. She could only have faith that time would enable him to discover his error.

When the fishing-boats were in again, she did not go down to the flats. She had risen early and gone to the sheep-field instead, to gather the early mushrooms. There were only enough for her father, but she preferred to go without rather than go down to the Fleet for fish while last week's incident was still raw in her mind. . . . She had put the pan on the fire and was standing with the dripping-jar and a knife in her hand when the knock came to the door. She put the things down instantly and crossed the floor and opened it. It was Harry Capgrave—the fair man whose name she did not know. She was thankful that the light was behind her, so that he could not see the color flooding her face. "I thought you'd like these. . . they're so bonny!" He held out a ring from which the fish hung like plaques. He gave her no chance of protest. "You've got to have them . . . you cheated yourself last Thursday. . . . I've had it on my conscience."

It was curiosity that drove her to ask him how he had found out her home.

"Oh, that!" he laughed, "that was the easiest thing in the world. . . . I wanted to," as if his mere will was a key to facts about persons. And at that moment she heard her father's footsteps coming down the avenue. She leaned out with her cheek brushing against the fuchsias. "That's my father!" she had cried, as if her father's presence turned the situation into a trap. She was

astonished when, instead of disappearing, he whistled and laid his hand on her arm. "That's all right, my girl," he said, and went up through the dusk to meet him. She had presence of mind enough to go back to her frying-pan. And her father brought him back and invited him to supper, and insisted that she should cook the fish there and then. The memory hurt her . . . the old beloved kitchen that was just a bright mirror struck by firelight from different facets, from everything the gleams came back; at the table over the white reading-lamp were bowed the heads of the two men—her father, with whom she shared all her knowledge of beasts and birds, and the flowers and every growing thing in the Potiphar gardens, and her wonderful Hunton holidays; iron-gray and rugged and stooped to the form of men who tend the earth. And this other man, fair and upright and sailor-eyed, who she was also, before the year was out, to shrine in her heart. How she had hated frying his fish, and positively scowled at him when he asked her with his laughing eyes "if they were not the sweetest fish she had ever tasted?" And indeed they were, but she did not know it then, because underneath her obedience to her father was a great wrath against him for playing quits upon her with such a gift as that! It was with great guile in her mind that she thought of emptying the contents of her red-pillar savings-box into his pocket when he wasn't looking. . . .

The storm was sinking. The bursts came less

frequently and the rain had dropped to a steady downpour. The night became a monotonous gloom in which her spirit grew heavier and heavier until she slept. She slept fitfully, waking at trivial sounds and hating them because they recaptured her anguish from oblivion. She wished that she could sleep forever and forget this new and terrible interpretation of Harry's absence.

The dawn came with quiet cruelty, making visible the familiar things that were as clues to the men who had gone out of her life. The old oak press had been her father's. She knew exactly where to put her finger to find, cut into the dark wood, the slits that marked her birthday measurements—until her mother died. After that he had never measured her again. And it was after her mother's death that the wonderful intimacy sprang up between them. She had not loved her father until then; she had smiled at him only at meals and accepted his right to pull her hair or straighten her pinny or call her "Miss Muffet" when her Sunday socks came down over the tops of her boots . . . that sheaf of moths rising out of the gray light by the mantelpiece was a bunch of honesty he had gathered. The vase in which it was set had two crossed anchors and "A present from Portsmouth" emblazoned on its luster. It was so light that she always felt that if she held it with the full force of her grasp it would crush to silver flakes in her hand. German, Harry said they were, and stocked in all

the ports of Europe. . . . Harry. . . . Harry. . . .

She rose quickly and pulled up the blinds of the window nearest her. The streets looked funny in the morning twilight, after the rain . . . like canals, strange and forsaken. The wet roofs looked as if some unhappy tide had risen and flooded over them in the night. Right across the town the dawn was pouring, blue-fingered and purple-edged. As she watched, the glory gathered every shadow. Clouds that were shrouds changed to wings that were ruddy and blown in the sky's rout of beauty. Steadily the day came, sweeping away the night's havoc with kindling flames until the morning burned fair and bright above the world—above her life. She let her eyes travel slowly across the clustered town and rested them upon the Western Gate, standing out, a dark arch, against the golden ribbon of the Western Road. In an hour or two the sun's rays would be this side of the gate, and, by shading her eyes, she would be able to see the soft patches where the stone-creepers lodged. The pigeons were mourning in a tree in one of the back gardens of Merchant Square. A wren was bursting its throat with piping effort . . . it was like a child praying with all its might because of God's mercy! She flung herself on her knees beside the bed and tried to pray, but the only prayer that would come was a cry to preserve her from remembering.

Downstairs, she drew up the blinds and opened all the windows and lit the fire. As soon

as the water boiled she poured it into a pail and refilled the kettle for Mr. Host's breakfast. She rolled up her sleeves, took her scrubbing things, and carried the pail into the hall to wash the linoleum before breakfast. A passion for work was upon her. Mr. Host had not asked her to call him. Perhaps he had forgotten! When her scrubbing was finished she took his shaving water upstairs and rapped at his door. A drowsy "yezm" answered her.

"Time to get up," she informed him, "your shaving water's on the mat and I'll have your breakfast ready in twenty minutes." She was rewarded by a clear "thank you." As she cooked his rashers she wished that she could do things slowly, it would not leave such gaps of idleness to be filled. As soon as he had gone she would turn out the parlor, and when she had finished that, she reckoned, it would be time to cook the dinner. In the afternoon, when everything was tidied up, she would dig up the bulbs out of the window-boxes and store them in the cupboard under the stairs. Then she would walk over as far as Potiphar and get back in time for tea. She must not forget about the bulbs. There would be a frosty night soon—they came unawares always.

She was surprised to see Mr. Host reading a book at that hour of the morning. Miss Mundesley never did that. He propped it up against the knitted tea-cosy while he poured out his tea. She ought not to have watched him. He was quite

justified when he turned round and regarded her as if her remaining was an impertinence—in her own parlor, if you please! But he was quite within his rights. "It's awfully bad for your digestion to read during your meals!" That was a quotation from Miss Mundesley. He looked sallow enough, with his gipsy coloring, for anything.

"Oh!" he laughed her fussiness into nonsense, "nothing like that ever affects me!" And then he almost apologized with an explanation, "It's something I began in the train—I had to finish it!"

She couldn't say another word of blame. "It must be rare exciting to get a grip on you like that!"

He held the book out to her. She had to take it. It had a blue binding and a strange title that was like the name of a ship. On the cover was a gold medallion with a man's face. She looked at it with a start, then closer. It was the image of Harry! Harry's very image! She had never seen another man with a beard like that, curling like sheep's wool right up to his ears. "Who is it?" she gasped.

"Jason!"

"Jason!" And again "Jason!" Her eyes turned blind. Harry's face was close to her . . . if his ghost had put out arms to her then, she would have answered endearingly. . . . Mr. Host's voice was laying words about her ears like laws. They conveyed nothing. She handed the

book back to him. "Eat your bacon," she said, "it will be stone cold."

She searched for the book afterwards, but he must have taken it with him because she could not find it. Her desire to look at it again was like a thirst. How silly she was, with a whole bundle of Harry's photographs in the drawer upstairs! She rolled up the woolly rug. Yes, she'd go upstairs and have a look at them. But she did not go; she hesitated, with the large black-lined bundle in her arms. She had looked at them so often. She knew every one of them by heart. And quite suddenly her mind turned away from the idea with a pang of distaste that made a voice scream in her heart that she would never look at them again.

She shook the rug furiously in the yard and hung it upon the wire line. When she stood up on the bricks that bastioned her neighbor's wall, to tighten the line, she caught a glimpse of saffron funnels rising from the Victoria docks and she wished she could be over there helping with the lading, pushing trucks too heavy for her or bending her back under a testing load—anything that would make a demand upon her strength and drain her to the blessed languor of exhaustion. In the room again, she came near to hate the trivial duties that asked no more of her than that she should be deft and careful. And then she asked God to help her. She stood, very tense, looking round the small place with a sort of pity as if it were not to blame because it could not

help her. The warmth of the red-plush furniture against the creamy walls was like a kind touch upon her senses until she recalled Harry's favorite remark that it was "a first-rate little saloon!" The old jealousy came back, of the magnificent saloons upon which his eyes must have feasted and been tempted into a disparaging comparison. Oh, the things in his life from which she had been shut out! . . . And now he was shut out with them. . . . She lifted her fish to her mouth and closed her teeth upon it to stifle the moan that was bursting from her. In a moment or so her reason asked what wild foolishness was this that came upon her? and ransomed her control! She looked round for her sweeping-brush. On the table by the window was a bright packet of gold-flake cigarettes. It was so long since she had seen a cigarette packet about the house that the sight moved her to tenderness, melted her with proof of another presence which was living if it invaded. All at once she surged with thankfulness for Mr. Host. She was glad he had come; she would take the greatest care of him—he was so thin and badly nourished, the poor boy, that she was sure her attention was needed. His need turned into her distraction, a distraction that it would be a mercy to serve. She would plan and cook the most wholesome meals for him and add him on, like a blessed dividend, to the labor that was inadequate in the use it made of her life. She would do his washing too, let him pay her or not! And if another lodger came, then she would

let her own room and swing up the hammock in the kitchen for herself. She wanted to spend herself, to wear herself out, to scourge her body with a fatigue that would shame the weariness in her soul.

When Mr. Host came in, punctually, at one o'clock the parlor smelt of Hudson's soap, and when his landlady opened the kitchen door she let out an appetizing odor that proved ultimately to be mutton chops and turnips.

"Do you like swedes?" she asked him, as she uncovered the dish and revealed the yellow pyramid with the chops bastioned against it. There was an extraordinary kindness about her as she stood, holding the inverted cover. She had forgotten to take off her scrubbing apron, and the fawn color of the coarse hessian which enveloped her hips and knees softened the blackness of the blouse above it and mellowed the pallor of her face.

"Jolly nice!" he sniffed.

"There now!" she said softly, "and I've done you some chips, and there's a bit of apple tart to come!"

"Apple tart," he repeated. He could not remember when he had last eaten apple tart, for, ever since his mother had been stricken with paralysis there had been nobody to make it. Mrs. Singleton, the daily woman, had a heavy hand when it came to puddings.

"Don't you take it for an extravagance . . . it costs me less than a milk pudding. I get my

apples for the asking. . . . I've never bought an apple in my life." Her voice drooped over the last words.

"Grow them in your own garden, I suppose?"

"Sure, you wouldn't call that a garden!" she said, "for all that there's a chestnut in it . . . the chestnut takes up all the good that's in the strip of soil. My husband was always for having it down, but I can't bear to see a tree slaughtered . . . this one does be a rare sight in the spring . . . no, I get my apples from Potiphar, you don't know the big place out on the Western Road?"

"The place with the Norman gates? I passed it last night!"

He must be a very clever young man to put a name to them like that. She knew those gates as well as she knew her own two hands and she never, until now, heard them associated with the Norman, which, for her, was a vague term to create an image of fair and exquisite men who did brave things for love. "That's the place; I was reared there . . . my father was head-gardener."

He was eating and made no comment. At the door, she remarked wonderingly, "You must have cut right across the town last night. Potiphar's a good walk!"

"Oh, not much. I wanted to see the Western Gate from the outside approach."

She stood with her hand on the door-knob, intrigued by this amazing propensity for gates.

It made her curious about him. She could not look out of her bedroom window any morning when she was dressing without seeing the Western Gate and the Old Tower of Saint Dukas' raising the gray surface of the town into the sky; edged points that carried the pattern upwards so that the horizon was perpetually invaded, and held against cloudy onslaughts. She went out in silence and shut the door quietly.

But that evening as she cleared away his tea things he spread a map out on the table. The enthusiasm of his face as he bent over it arrested her. The motion of his long brown hands exhibited a caressing tenderness that she had never before encountered concerning learned things. "I can see," she said, "that you are a great one for study. Miss Mundesley never did that; she left her books and maps in the schoolroom."

"This hasn't anything to do with my school work," he answered cryptically, and returned to his survey.

Now, for what could he be searching a map? she thought. He couldn't be going on a journey. There were maps in Harry's books, but Harry never looked at them until after a voyage, when he picked out places he had been to and made clumsy, ineffectual efforts to describe them to her. She saw more than he ever told her . . . the pinky-whiteness of foreign wharves spotted by dark-skinned men . . . the tired whinnying mules. His pauses and hesitations gave to her mind the sunlight and the breath of the form he

failed to fill . . . bare trees that fruited at their summits . . . lee shores that were white wisps of wonder upon the edge of a jungle, a cry of pain . . . but she was trying not to think of Harry. Out there, in the kitchen, thought would be sure to come. If Mr. Host had not opened this map upon the table she would not have remembered. . . . "Is it places you've been to?" she asked frantically, clutching at his interest.

When he looked at her there was a hunger in her eyes that made him feel sorry as one might for a child's ignorance. He began to tell her with a sort of pitying assuagement for her curiosity, feeling certain in his mind that it could not interest her. "It's a map of Roman Britain . . . all round here, you know, was once occupied by the Romans."

"The Romans," she repeated, "there's nothing about them in the church, and many ancient folk are mentioned there."

"No. There wouldn't be, they were before Christianity."

She was aware that Christianity had not always existed, but the ease with which he said, "before Christianity" shocked her as much as if he had said "before God" . . . it washed back upon her that knowledge was a profane thing. It took one's love away almost as it took one's breath. When Miss Hermione had tried to explain to her about the primroses that she had gathered in the beech coppice, using strange unfamiliar words—pistil and stamen—she had had the same out-

raged feeling. What did a name matter when the flowers were so lovely in themselves that she had to bury her face in them and kiss the lovely sweetness with her lips! Mr. Host was looking at her as if he thought she was dreadfully stupid. "What were they like, the Romans?" She was afraid that he would ask her to leave him alone, "Were they black?" She must have said something very funny for he laughed. A low deep laugh that surprised her. It was not a young laugh—to match the youth that was so evident upon him. Harry's laugh was deep-chested . . . the ruddy hair spread upon his white skin. . . .

She looked so hurt, almost as though his laughter whipped her, that Stephen Host was urged again, absurdly, to tell her about the Romans. Her interest surprised him and warmed him in the telling. Her silent, newly intelligent eyes were like an added verification of his purpose. Her interest, the amazing, unexpected interest of a landlady, added to the interest of Dr. Pledge, convinced him for a second time that the opportunity to fulfil his vow to his father had arrived in earnest. He resolved to lose no time in making the most of it. "No," he answered her, "they came from Rome, in Italy, you know, in the Mediterranean. . . ."

"Yes," she said absently, "the ships go through there to Port Said."

"They tried several times to conquer Britain, but they hadn't any success to speak of until Claudius sent Aulus Plautius."

She turned the full-mouthed names over in her mind. They had a warrior-sound. . . . Claudius and Aulus Plautius. She imagined them, brave and muscular and with a dignity that would spare neither mercy nor hate. "I never knew," she said simply, "that England ever belonged to any but the English." The Normans she had always regarded as ancient gay visitors who married whom they pleased.

"Why, look," Mr. Host was saying, "they held all this!"

She went over to the side of the table and tried to follow the direction of his finger on a map that was marked Britannica Romana. So that was why they put Britannia on the pennies and national banners! The sudden knowledge thrilled her like a gift of something that she had often handled but never, until now, possessed. "Eh!" she cried, "how wonderful!"

He looked round at her with glowing eyes. "Yes, isn't it? They never really conquered us, you know, but we've got them in our blood . . . it's a fine thing . . . we've got the best of them."

"It's a map of England?" She wanted to make sure.

He assured her that it was a map of England, smiling because he had introduced her to an England that was new as well as old.

She put a finger tentatively upon it, "Southampton's there!"

"Clausentum!"

She said the word under her breath. Below it

was a blot of an island marked Vectis, and between them and the map's mileage was a tiny pencil drawing of a chariot with straining horses urged by men with shields and spears. Men obeying the word of Claudius and Aulus Plautius. "And to think," she said, turning her slow gaze upon Mr. Host, "that there were ever folk like that fighting up and down the roads of England."

"Without them, the roads might never have been made!"

The bare statement did not prevail against her sense of rightness. Her thoughts plunged to the Western Road defensively. "But Lenne?" she pleaded.

"The shape of Lenne is Roman." He was only reiterating a desire in his mind, but to her the phrase sounded as though he had picked it out of a document. And when she looked at him the eagerness was so bright upon his face that she wondered. It invested him with an idea that resembled love because it was an enrichment of life. There was something about men that wandered out of them, seeking, seeking; something that made them fondle passing things as if they were proofs in a quest to which they passed. Women stored things up in their hearts. It would be a great mercy to her if she could fall back upon her old passion for places—the old gate-lodge that used to fill her with a sweet wildness of pleasure whenever it responded to her ministrations. More than once when the rippling wave came out a lighter shade upon the stone flags and

spread a pattern that was like watered silk she had had a feeling, a holy sort of feeling, she couldn't describe it, a kind of exultation. It made the common world of her existence alight with mystery that one could never be sure of. Several things gave her variations of that feeling: the way the darkness stood up like a stick in the brass twist of the candlesticks, the way the lake shone under the moon, magic ridden, music hidden in every wind that blew across it. . . . "I've often had a queer feeling," she said slowly, "about Merchant Square. There's a door there, studded like a piece of harness, with oak leaves cut into the border . . . it must be very old. . . ."

"Merchant Square's twelfth-century," said Mr. Host with the same ease as he had said "Norman gates."

She regarded him steadily. And for the first time it occurred to her that history was just a name for the tidiness of the world and as simple as her own habit of keeping things in their proper places. "I'd like to know more about Lenne!" she declared, and her voice was raised as by the fleck of some promise. She felt certain that Mr. Host would not chill her by a rebuke, and so desperate did she feel in her need for something to occupy her mind that, even if he had, she would have circumscribed his denial by using his books on her own account, when he wasn't there!

But Mr. Host behaved as if he were about to convert her to a new and wonderful faith. "You must begin from the beginning," he advised, "for-

get the Lenne you know and try to imagine a marshy forest . . . it was to that they came, not as marauders but with an impulse to spread civilization . . . you must read . . ." he went to the row of books on the top of the cupboard, "here's Cargill's *Roman Traces*. There's a little about Lenne there, but not enough . . ." he turned to her with an introductory air, "my father, before he died, began a book about Lenne. He wanted to prove that it had a Roman origin . . . I—I want very much to finish his book!"

"To write a book!"

He nodded. He was very tall and slender standing there against the firelight with the book he had chosen for her to read in his hand; the red binding showed like a bright label against the dark coat he was wearing. She felt that she had discovered a secret about him that made him precious, so that in serving him she would be serving a hidden grandeur. She would do her best for him now with doubled interest. "It's a good thing you came here. It's quiet."

"I wish," he appealed, "that you could keep me for good."

"You can stay," she answered, not knowing how to reveal to him that the mercy was on his side.

His thanks were fervent. And as he put the book into her hand she wondered if he looked at his mother like that whenever he wanted to be specially kind to her.

He wasn't thinking about her at all as he gave

her that book. His own thoughts were aflame—unfurled from the smoke of doubt into surety. He was going to write! He was going to write! He would begin at once, as soon as she had left the room, with the thoughts that came into his head at Dr. Pledge's. He would capture that mood—and keep it, so that whatever he would write would burn with conviction. He imagined his mother's pleasure. . . . But she did not go. She stood there smiling with that smile of hers that was already an enigma to him. It was too grave for impertinence, yet it had something of a boy's extraneousness—generated within her and apart from him.

"Does it come easy to you? I suppose it does!"

"Good heavens! No!" he exclaimed and pulled himself up upon the futility of explanation to her. She would never understand if he said, I've been fighting against it for years . . . only my mother . . . ! Afterwards, he realized that he had been on the very verge of telling her something that he had been hiding from his mother for years.

"There now! I envy you!"

"Envy me?"

"Yes. Having something *hard* to do . . . something against the grain!"

Youth was too strongly lodged within him for him to comprehend her full wisdom. He was too young to want to do anything that was not an impulse from the heart and emotions. The loveliest work in the world sprang from those roots. . . . Now, that the well of his being had been

reached he might make a fine thing of this book. "A book isn't quite like cooking a dinner," he said with fine scorn, feeling that he had put the matter upon her own plane. The flicker of her gaze rebuked him . . . "in a way. . . ."

"I know that," she said simply and looked away from him. That was Harry's attitude. Men seemed unaware of the spirit that infused things . . . it wasn't only their victories, but the sense with which they met victory that was different. It made them blind. She looked back at him, a kind of pity filming her eyes. "I'll make you as comfortable as I can, so that you can get on with it."

"That's jolly decent of you." His outspread fingers were traveling up and down his pockets searching for his cigarettes.

"Not a bit of it." The way he struck the match, with his back towards her and his shoulders hunched, was a dismissal.

There was no need for her to go out. She had no intention of going out. But when she sat down in the chair by the kitchen fire the bare table taunted her with idleness. She stroked its scoured surface meditatively. If it had purred or stirred like a tame beast she might have gone on stroking it, dreaming, content because something was answering her touch. Its unresponsiveness made her exclaim in her thoughts that she really ought to have a cat about the house . . . restlessly, she rose and went over to the books . . . she did not dare to open them. Merely looking at them sent

the agony going again. She picked up a cup from the dresser, without looking, and when she looked it was one of those enormous china cups with a mustache lip and a fluted edge that Harry had bought. She put it down so quickly that she nearly broke it. In desperation she snatched the grocer's passbook off its hook and opened it as if the hard facts of her expenditure might steady her . . . really she couldn't cut holes in her stockings and there was absolutely not a scrap of mending to be done . . . rashers! She must remember to ask Mr. Host if he liked streaky or back . . . the back-cut would be more substantial. . . . She would need an extra half-pound. And suddenly, as if this affair of the rashers was as urgent as an unexpected illness, she decided to go to the grocer's. It was Friday and they would be open until nine o'clock. She never did her shopping until Saturday, and an uneasy voice in her conscience warned her that she was disorganizing her to-morrow. To-morrow could take care of itself. She was pushing to-morrow—every to-morrow—away as she might have put up her hands against an enemy.

The steep incline of Fleetway Street was deserted. She looked down to the bottom as she paused upon the doorstep. The narrow shimmer of water, shining like a piece of polished metal, chased her eyes away. It occurred to her then that life had become a conspirator in some game to remind her of Harry. Had she been asleep all these months? She hurried furiously to the top of the street, and stood, panting for breath, at the

corner of the square. She could see the market from there, the buzz of folk like bees, the skeletons of the stalls for to-morrow. . . . Yes, it was just as well for her to change her shopping day Saturday to Friday. There would be less to remind her. . . . There was Mr. Feeney, the jeweler, crossing the square. A fat man, like an egg in a swallow-tail coat. She saw him suddenly, a Roman in a chariot with a spear . . . it was too comic! The only spear she could think of in his hands was the little jeweled arrow-brooch she had seen in his window. The twilight horizon was a smoke-blue wall of rain-clouds, close-packed, unspilled. Above the wall was a rippled strip of fleece, white-headed as summer waves. As she watched, it spread into a sea set for sails. . . . "My God!" she cried out in her heart, " is everything going to drive me mad about Harry?" She walked on again with quick, hurried steps and lowered eyes. And she was saying, wildly, ridiculously, over and over again to herself, bacon, bacon, bacon, as if the word of her necessity was a prayer for help. It was in the grocer's that the extravagant notion came to her to make a cake. It was the picture on the packet of baking-powder that did it—the happy young woman with the scales and the two children pulling at her apron strings. It was ages since she had baked a cake; it always went stale on her. But now that she had Mr. Host! She had never known a man to turn up his nose at a good cake. She asked for the sixpence-worth of cracked eggs in a voice as full

of zealous expectation as if she were asking for an excursion ticket. . . .

She made up the fire—it was fair silly of her at that time of night! But the relief of something to do was so great upon her that she could not put it off, even her common sense was on the side of the opposition. And it was a beautiful cake! Beautiful as a cake in a picture! She regarded it with pride before she took it out of the oven. The almonds and raisins on the surface were brown and crisp and crackling sweet. She was sure it would cut well. She had never baked a cake with greater care. She was down on her knees admiring it when Mr. Host knocked at the door. "Come in!" she cried, wondering if the good smell had attracted him. It was a good hour since she had given him his supper.

He could see only her head on the other side of the kitchen table. Her wide eyes looking so penetratingly across at him across the clean space made him strangely shy. He wished he had not come. "If you please. . . ."

"Yes!"

"A knife . . . you forgot to give me a knife!"

She rose, disturbed. "Forgot to give you a knife. . . . I never forget anything!" They stared at each other. She rescued him from confusion. "Oh, I mind now! I laid your tray all right with the knife and fork on it, then I took it off, I was baking. But that's an hour ago! Do you mean to tell me you've never tasted your supper yet?"

Why! Hang the woman! His thoughts muttered, she'd be spoon-feeding him next! "That's quite all right. I'm going to eat it now. I've been busy."

"But you could have said. . . ."

"I suppose I could," he answered sharply and put out his hand. As she did not move he withdrew it again.

"It's very silly of you . . . and I'm not going to let you drink cold cocoa." Her voice was as kind as she could make it.

"Oh, I drank the cocoa . . . it's the other stuff!"

She had to laugh at him. It outraged him. He turned on his heel. For a second she regarded him in amazement. "Now don't be offended?" She felt as if she was speaking to a little boy. "I know quite well how you forgot; the time flies when one's doing anything. I haven't had any supper myself. . . . I've been baking. You must see," she turned quickly and whipped the cake out of the oven with the end of her apron, "look at this! Isn't it a fine one?"

"A cake!" he cried.

"Yes. Isn't it a nice one?"

"It looks very excellent, very excellent indeed."

And before she quite knew what she was doing she was cutting him a piece. Sheer waste—to cut a cake hot out of the oven like that! It was common good feeling to eat a piece along with him, to prevent him from feeling that he had been begging. "It's so crumbly. . . ."

"It's delicious! Ripping!" And as if to empha-

size his appreciation he swung his leg up on the kitchen table and sat down on it, holding the plate with the piece of cake on it close under his chin.

She ate her own piece slowly, conscience-smitten. So wasteful! Was she losing her senses? She knew that if anybody had told her an hour or two ago that she would be eating hot cake, with her new lodger perched on her kitchen table, at ten o'clock at night, she would not have believed it! What on earth was coming over her? She was on the point of telling him how late it was, when he spoke.

"This reminds me . . . my mother used to bake quite a lot before she became ill."

"She is ill?" Sympathy was ready in her eyes.

"Yes, for almost two years now. She—she'll never be quite fit again."

"She must miss you!" His absence struck her as his mother's need. It was her clearest expression of understanding.

"She does. She hates it. I'm the only person she's got! But she wanted me to go. She's dreadfully keen on my writing the book. I came to Lenne specially."

"To write your book?"

He nodded.

"And so you must!" she said emphatically, "only eat your food when I bring it to you," she shook an admonitory finger; "what's the use of my taking care of you if you won't take care of yourself? You can do no work of any lasting value on an empty stomach!"

He accepted her advising speech smilingly. Really she wasn't such a bad sort! "You must chivvy me up!" he retorted, and gave the rights of his behavior into her hands.

"And so I will," she agreed. "I'll not have you going back to your mother with your body pinched and your chest as flat as if you'd been under the steam-roller—Mary Jessop."

He gave his jolly laugh. "Mary Jessop! It's usually the Empress of Britain!"

CHAPTER III

THAT was certainly the crisis in her acceptance. She could not very well feel again that he had no right to be in her house. For now that he had eaten hot cake, straight out of her oven, he was no longer an alien. And the intimate things she had learned about him entitled him to a dwelling-place in her thoughts. His mother, and his book! Between these two truths about him he swung like a pendulum in her mind—keeping his own measure. But all the time it was her need for him! Refuse to face it, as she sometimes tried after those first instinctive moments, the fact remained that her extravagant interest in him was not generated by any value of his at all, but by her own desperate reaction. . . . He had come to her—almost falsely! That first morning, upon her doorstep, upon the doorstep of her heart's hunger, he had the appearance of one who brought her news. It was not news he brought, but the most bitter verification of what she had known for a long time . . . underneath. She scarcely cared, indeed she scarcely knew, whether she liked him. He sufficed as a fairly ample and absorbent object of devotion.

Stephen Host was blind as a bat to all she did for him. For all he knew of landladies she might

have been the most common sample of her kind. In a day or so he got used to her. And getting used to her blurred all that made him question her—her queer habit of smiling as if he were a joke or a commiseration; her habit of lingering. He even got used to her poking her head in at the door to see if he were eating his supper. She always withdrew it again immediately, making the action a dumb reminder.

But the reminder remained for a few minutes. Her door-framed presence was stamped into the early Britain crowd in his brain. His mind would break from these and wander . . . the Venta Icenorum would no longer be a way hewn, for him, from the Antonine Itinerary, but an earthly road captained by dark-eyed men whose smiles were Southern . . . there would be women passing . . . women with insurgent wills and emotional hearts—whose hearts would betray them! So that the men who were their brothers' keepers would rule not their hate but their love . . . humanity was born from these conflicts in which the will of women ran like water. You could never depend upon women . . . and yet, without their weakness the races would never be mingled or begotten! And that Roman strain must have been good, disciplining the Celtic . . . making poets manifest—not idle dreamers. He was afraid of women. Davoren was quite right! He was a born recluse. . . . Even his mother had a complexity about her that shut a door upon his own simplicities of understanding. She could see,

not the direct issue he saw, but layers and layers of issues—and what was more, let them trouble her. He had watched them brooding in her eyes. It was no use telling her not to meet trouble half-way. She was always quite ready for disaster. His father's death was a catastrophe that had, in some mysterious fashion, prepared her for some eternal sequence of misfortune . . . any moment a blow might come out of space . . . a rainy day plunged her into a mood that was beyond all the powers of consolation. And when she began to talk about his father she would go on and on moaning the unfulfilment of his life until his patience was wrung dry from pity and he would ask her for heaven's sake to stop! Had she not him? But then she could see in him, also, she told him, the characteristics that had wrecked his father's life—the lack of will, of determination, of application . . . women wanted perfection! Wanted everything in a shell unbroken, as if perfection were an egg that could be laid, all ready for use, in the nest of attainment! They were unreasonable, always sticking in the flesh of one's effort with the prods of appeal and timid sentences. When he looked back, it was really nothing short of a miracle that he had got his *senior optime*! His mind would always have spurts and quick pools of its own. He had written . . . his own things, a play . . . but always she came back! Absence from her but imaged her and the purpose she had set him, more completely, imaged her with her needs rather than her failings, so

that instead of her poor racked body upon its couch, her burning will seemed to be lying stretched upon his consciousness crying out to him, pleading, pointing an unwavering finger in the direction she wanted him to go. He was not allowed any dreams of his own. Every dream he fashioned was caught in the surging tyranny of her love and came back a derelict upon the shore of his disappointment. Perhaps, he sometimes thought, once he had written this dreadful book, this wonderful book, that was like some achievement wrought in Tartarus, she would be appeased and his father's ghost would no longer be a menace between them! He had been timid always in his father's presence. . . . He was too young to know, to understand . . . a tall man with a gray beard and eyes sunken like two stars of granite . . . walking over clay fields, picking up flints . . . hedges ripe with blackberries that they passed by . . .

Yes, she accepted him. But not completely. Not so completely as she cheated herself to believe. For, when he told her, one bleak December day, that they would be breaking up at the end of the week for the Christmas vacation, she experienced a marvelous sense of relief, like having something you valued and had lent, given back to you. "On the twentieth?"

"Yes." His hair needed cutting, he remembered. Why the devil was she staring? It couldn't be so long as that!

"And when do you come back?"

"In a fortnight!" It was a trick she had, flattening her hand against her bosom. "I'll write!"

"No, don't bother. I'll know! It'll be . . ." She broke off calculatingly.

"It'll be a Monday, as a matter of fact . . . I'll probably come up by an early train and go straight on to the school."

"But you'll be in for dinner!"

She would think the house was going to fall if he would not be in for dinner! It made him sorry for her, then sarcastic. "I'll be punctual!"

His sarcasm was wasted. She saw him . . . she couldn't explain, but he was different, more of a stranger; more as he might have looked in her sight when she first met him, if her vision had not been sprung to imbue him with a meaning mysterious to her need. A handsome youth, shoulders too stooping, and it was painful to her to see the tight way he knotted his ties. It wasn't fair to his ties! It flashed upon her that she had been extraordinarily good to him. He was looking better. His mother would be sure to be pleased. Poor woman! Illness was not so bad upon a mother, she imagined, for women who had borne children would always have a nursery in their memory—where they could go to play! It would be lovely to have the house to herself again—to think of Harry . . . without the pain. She had healed a little from that. She knew now that he would never, never, come back, never! But he was hers eternally. It was just as if he had gone a voyage, a long, long voyage. . . . "Oh, my dear!"

her thoughts cried out, "I haven't been pushing you away . . . it's only that I just couldn't bear. . . ." Mr. Host was staring at her so funnily that, for a moment, she thought she had been speaking aloud. "I didn't say anything?"

"Say anything?"

"Oh! I thought I must have been speaking."

He withdrew his eyes from her, as if he were afraid to let her see what he was thinking about her, and began to point the new lead-pencil he was gripping. She watched the yellow-edged parings flash and catch upon his waistcoat. . . .

Between him and the knife-blade his mind cut her face with that rapt, blind look upon it . . . he seemed to take her likeness, then, like a photograph.

The morning of his going away was bitter, raw cold. The schoolroom air showed little funnels of vapor when the boys breathed heavily; some of the boys did it on purpose—watching their breath-clouds discharge and vanish. Red-haired Allen Ruse was blowing into the next boy's ear. Between their elbows he saw a capital T and cross-bones carved into the oaken desk. Dr. Pledge was reading the quarterly report. His class had not done very well. He was not a good disciplinarian . . . his classes would always be squirming boys—squirming minds as well as bodies—against which he would be bleating out knowledge in a thin laminated way; getting nothing back but the flattest echo and mockery of himself. A whisper, "what price Hannibal?" and

WOODLAND • CALIFORNIA

a flash of bright furtive eyes, made him suddenly self-conscious. In sheer nervousness he pulled out of his pocket the scrap of paper, a sheet torn from a pass-book, that Mrs. Capgrave had given him. She gave it to him every week without variance. "To week's room, board, laundry, and attendance, Mr. Host, fifteen and six. Paid with thanks, Annie Capgrave." Paid with thanks, Annie Capgrave. Exactly like her! Meticulous, careful. . . . By jove! She was the sort who would refuse to enter Heaven if, by accident—and it would only be by accident—she brought a venial sin upon her soul. He saw her black, buxom figure going to church, praying, ending up with the King and the Royal family . . . coming home to cook the dinner. Simple? Good God! yes. How it must preserve her! "Sit up, Ruse," he called in a loud whisper, and surprised the same look upon the boy's face that he had caught when he tried to tell him about the horned lambs of Libya.

He forgot about all these things in the train, going home. It was good to get away from the beastly school. Fortunately, for him, Dr. Pledge was so decent. It made him a compensation—they nearly quarreled about the Roman foundation . . . but at the root, Dr. Pledge supported him!

The red-and-white Hunton cliffs showed him welcome. But he was restless, the act of climbing released some latent energy in him that was cramped, hidden, stifled, but not buried. He felt

manacled. And as he ascended the old cliff path to the Links Hotel to get the motor-bus to Rising Slepe the cold gray sight of the sea made him wish, as he wished a million times, that he had opposed his mother and gone abroad. With his qualifications he could easily have managed it through one of the language colleges . . . somewhere on the Bosphorus, in the very throes of East meeting West. That was the sort of life he wanted—action—not all this picking over and over of dead men's bones, tracing footsteps. . . . But it had to be, he supposed. He realized the destined force of his life all the more poignantly when he saw his mother. It would break her heart . . .

"I can't turn my head, dear, my neck—I've caught cold!"

It wasn't the cold. Her poor frame was stiffer. Her mouth had altered, the upper lip was longer and clung to her teeth so that one could see how difficult it was for her to speak clearly, to get the driving words out. He put his arms round her, wishing he could warm her into motion. "I wish you were young, mother!"

Her smile rewarded him. The moment was piled up—like a heap of pennies he had been saving.

"That's very nice, Stephen, very . . . you've improved. . . ." He had thrown his head back so that she could peer into his face. "Tea . . . it's early, but Mrs. Singleton's left it all ready. . . ." She tried to look round and the attempt added

"somewhere" to her jerky sentence. She had the manner of one around whom things happened that she could not place.

He comforted her. "Here it is! See! I'll move the table!" He lifted it and carried it forward, away from the fire, to where she could see it.

"Is the water boiling?"

It was. He poured it into the teapot. "Where's old Singleton. . . . I say, Mum, you oughtn't to be alone like this!"

"I'm not!" One could feel the argument smothered in her voice. Her explanation seemed to come out through a sieve, "It's only because she knew you were coming . . . she slipped in to tidy her own place."

"But at night. . . ." Conscience smote him. Somebody ought to be with her at night. Supposing she ever needed anything!

"She sleeps here now . . . ever since the cold. . . ."

"When did you—get cold?" he asked dryly.

"A week . . . it was at night . . . I oughtn't . . . Mrs. S. keeps me bricked up with hot-water bottles." The smile made delta-like lines at the corners of her eyes. He turned away from the burning brightness of her look that was such an unveiled declaration of her joy in him. It made him ashamed, unworthy . . . and then, angry as if he had been trapped into some hateful inequality. Clumsily, holding the teapot too low, he began to pour out tea. Water, clear as crystal, issued from

the spout. "Fool!" he muttered inwardly. "I've forgotten the tea." He saw it instantly in the old walnut tea-caddy on the tray. Hoping that she had not seen, he sneaked it and the pot over to the hob.

But of course she saw! And if he had looked at her then he would have seen how wry her smile had become. "That's *one* of the things I could do for him!" she was saying to herself with bitter, hard, patience-exhausted emphasis. The blue fans on the Indian-red cover of the eider-down seemed to multiply, wave on wave, in derision, "After tea, Stephen. . . ."

"Yes," he answered, brisk with relief, as he capped the lid on the teapot.

"You must tell me about your book!"

"Of course, I shall. . . . I'm making progress! But, you know, it doesn't always come . . . it moves slowly. . . . I've a trump of a landlady . . . I'll tell you all about it."

But after tea Mrs. Singleton came in and took possession of her with an air of mystery. Stephen went up to his room to wash his hands. Coming downstairs again he saw, through the fanlight, that a motor car had stopped at the garden gate. He opened the door and went down the path, to save a ring. It was a low mole-colored two-seater with a girl at the wheel, wrapped in dark furs. She turned her head and looked at him smilingly. He stared back at her and said nothing. It seemed that it would be rude to go back and shut the door in her face.

"Hullo, Mr. Stephen Host!"

He was enveloped in her smile, caught, and held. Who could she be? "I'm sorry!"

"Oh, don't be, please! Don't you remember Pocahontas Villa?" Her laugh rippled like a lot of berries on a polished table.

A gleam came to him, "now which . . .?" he began.

"Honest as usual . . . couldn't pretend! Well, I'm not Dorcas . . . she's married your *locum tenens*. I'm staying with them . . . we guessed immediately the call came for Mrs. Host. This is the third time, for luck, I've been out!"

"I didn't know. . . ."

"Of course you didn't . . . how could you?"

He looked at her as if there might still be a chance of rescuing her from her breathless flippancy. "I didn't know my mother has been having the doctor again . . . they didn't tell me."

"How silly of them! Aren't you old enough for shocks?" Her smile tempered her cheekiness.

"Shocks!" He hadn't thought. . . . Distressed, he asked quickly, "Is it very serious?"

"Oh, not very, I suppose . . . but, in her state, Wilfrid says . . . and those swollen hands!"

He hadn't noticed her hands. They must have been hidden. He looked at the girl, puzzled, thinking of his mother. That accounted for Mrs. Singleton—perhaps she'd have told him if he had gone out of the room with her when she took the tray! He remembered a sign now!

"On the other hand, she may last for years,

paralyzed people often do." She felt infinitely sorry for him with his grave dark eyes.

"Did Wilfrid say that too?"

She laughed. "Yes, I suppose he did! I asked him. I wanted to nurse her—I am quite a good nurse, but your mother wouldn't consent, and Mrs. Singleton was in a state of mutiny."

"But why?" he asked, urged by instant candor.

"Oh, why?" She shrugged her shoulders, and looked away. "No reason at all? I just remembered Pocahontas Villa, and those times. . . . Hugh is dead. . . ." He would never be able to guess what Hugh had grown to be like.

A boy in a blue jersey came back to him, keeping the wicket . . . the cleft in his chin . . . the wild, wild passion of mounting runs, the tree-shadows like water on the grass. Nothing ever happened now with that panic of fierce, urgent delight. . . .

"I've never had a holiday like that . . . poor old Hughie!"

She was picking up flush-lined shells—the windy sea-spray upon her hair, her lips . . . that day she was mad jealous because they fought for Dorcas. . . . "I'm much better looking than Dorcas, now!" she said irrelevantly, looking up at him with an arch triumph upon her face.

The ease with which she laid claim to his praise embarrassed him. He hadn't yet remembered her name. It was something they made a joke about. Dorcas was the older one, the fair one . . . next to Hughie . . . she came out of the door on

the landing when Hughie hit him on the nose and they nearly fell downstairs. . . .

Instinctively she knew that he had forgotten. She prompted him. "Is a bell a beggar?"

"Isabel Beggary!"

She bowed, tilting her chin over the dark furs. "How do you do?"

"I say! You have changed!"

The penetrating softness of her brown eyes measured his interpretation. "I've grown up, of course!" She sprang from ruefulness to wipe away an old injustice. "I can't have altered *so* much . . . the bony structure of my face must always have been *there* . . . my lines . . . I've learned that much since I've been to South Kensington!" Her gloved finger was tracing the rim of the wheel. "I spend half my time being a model for my friends!" Conceit was transfused by her directness into merry witchery.

"You're studying. . . ."

"Only design!" she interrupted, "I'm just arty crafty. . . . I've got to earn my living!"

A farm cart laden with mangels went past, magnified and then filmed by the winter twilight. He looked back at her—drawn.

"Come and see us. Wilfrid has taken on Doctor Thatcher's house until he comes back from Italy."

"I should like to, very much." And suddenly the headlights of the car brightened, the mole color spread, mingling with the mist that was becoming more and more visible. Their short,

formal sentences seemed to spread too, and merge into the mists of being . . . it was very blissful, quiet, sharpened by the swift-coming darkness. . . . Her presence there, in the dusk-veiled car by the curbstone, the sounds, behind him, of an opening door, voices, steps. . . .

When he went back into the house again, it was as though he had been gazing into a pool, waiting expectantly for a wavering reflection to settle, so that he could see—and yet, he did not remember a feature in her face . . . only the bright coalescent tenderness in her eyes.

"Naughty Mother!" he said gently, imitating her inflection "naughty boy!" when he used to wear the seats out of his pants.

Her eyes trembled, filled with tears she marvelously willed from falling. "I am better."

"Yes, thank heaven! But supposing you weren't."

"Ah! Time enough. . . ." She was thankful the shade of the reading-lamp was down, casting her into its merciful shelter.

"This new doctor, Roper, what do you think? He's married that little girl, Dorcas Beggary. You know, that last summer we spent at Hunton and stayed. . . ."

She wished Mrs. Singleton would be quick. ". . . I know, Stephen . . . with a governess . . . *she* married the uncle!"

"No! Really? You always said he was her chief pupil. I say, they want me to look them up!"

"Yes, you must . . . Steevie. . . ." If only he would stop fidgeting with the ivory teeth on the desk. It made her blood shiver. It was like a drink to parched lips when he turned, attentive. "Tell Mrs. Singleton to come." She thought it was quite clever the way she had trained herself to get her sentences into as few words as possible. At first she used to stutter. Now, there were only gaps in which people seemed to grasp her meaning . . . he needed a new suit of clothes. That blue serge was positively shiny. She must remember to tell him to-morrow . . . to-morrow . . . to-morrow . . . she was always putting things off.

He did not take from his mother any of the time he felt bound to give her. He was always in to meals, always drank his tea in her sitting-room, and, although it was one of her forbidden things and she did not share it with him, she always showed him, what she called, her bright side. It was during his walks, for, of course, he had to have exercise, that he slipped over to Hunton. The short snatched visits were like a tangle of colored wools in which, when he rooted, was the bright early pattern of Pocahontas Villa. Dorcas, the new Mrs. Roper, still lint-haired and pale-eyed—forget-me-nots and primroses—and this new Isabel who had ripened and warmed by some wine-like miracle out of the rather thin, long-legged girl who was always going off by herself. Dorcas still put him at ease. It appeared to be her special quality. She was quiet, she never flurried his mood so that he found himself doing

something entirely different from what he had intended. Isabel did that. That first day, one morning, when he offered her a cigarette . . . she raised her face from the black-and-whiteness of the piano and the way her nimble fingers flashed out and nipped it from him, caught him unawares, made him stand, like a fool, holding an unlighted match in his hand. She was between the firelight and the morning sunlight, wearing something brown. Her presence dissolved in tones that were like spring when the sun struck her, and like autumn on the side next the fire. Her low laugh was like running water . . . laughter under willows . . . pheasants on the wing. . . .

When he asked her to come for a walk, he knew quite well that he was acting idiotically, for there was barely time to get home for his early dinner, and his mother and Mrs. Singleton would be in a state of nerves. "Come along the links," he begged, "I must catch the twelve-twenty bus."

She held back, and then, before he mustered an appeal, walked on again. She made him feel like the cigarette morning. . . . The sea was gray, dark and light, "as if somebody had been writing on it with a slate pencil," she said. There were the scribbly lines, curly, calligraphic. The sky was low, for rain. He could see the shadowy spiked line of the Lincolnshire coast. It made him think of King John—tired, subtle, besieged . . . blinding his besiegers with bandages. For what was Magna Charta but a vast belly-land keeping the Liberty of the People in its place!

All those kings, down to the Tudors, were nothing better than pompous Lord Mayors—gold chains, velvets, the rabble at their heels. . . . Henry the Eighth knew how . . . he owed a lot to his Spanish wife.

"When do you go back?"

He pulled his mind in—it had got to the Moorish conquest, to wonder why the question was so familiar, as if she had asked him twice. "Do you know," he said, looking round into her face, "the funny feeling one gets—that something has happened before? I feel like that—that you've asked me that before, just like this!" He couldn't tell her that by "just like this" he meant, when he was thinking of something else; and that her clear voice, springing so close, had wiped a whole troupe of white-clad galloping Arabs out of his vision. And then, he remembered that it was not she who had asked, but Mrs. Capgrave who had not said "*go* back" but "come back." He had to leave it there. "Day after to-morrow."

"Oh, then I shan't see you!"

"I'll be over to-morrow." He did not add "unless my mother . . ." He had said it so often that every assignation he made with them carried his mother as a rider. "But, even if I don't turn up, I'm bound to see you again."

"I don't see that it follows! We've lived all these years since Pocahontas on different sides of Hunton, and never met!"

"Well, we were at school!" he argued, as if she were blaming him.

"Then why didn't we come home in the same trains?"

"That," he said gravely, "must have been the fault of the railway companies!"

"Or the school time-tables!"

School time-tables, he repeated to himself. His class came back—a vicious swarm, hiving upon his defeated efforts. "I am trying to write a book," he told her in a reaction to redemptions. He thought she hadn't heard. Her profile was very serene, soft-flushed, her lashes lying quite motionless along her cheek.

She spoke dreamily, "I was beginning to wonder!"

"Wonder?"

"Whether you were ever going to create anything—or if you were the other sort."

"I'm afraid I really am the other sort. This isn't . . . it's—a sort of tradition . . . it's been handed down."

"You're not doing another man's job?"

"I am. My father's!" He had never seen it like that, as another man's job. "And why shouldn't I?"

"It's a pity . . ." she paused, full-lipped with young wisdom, with things she wanted to say.

"History's different," he argued, and felt like Hamlet, before the steady conviction in her eyes. "Anyhow I'm jolly certain I shan't do anything else until I get this off my chest."

"Is it a promise?"

"It is," he said firmly, feeling sure he had put the matter upon a fairly sacred stand.

She was standing, with shining, serious eyes, "Oh, Stephen! How absurd you are! You don't see yourself a bit as you are . . . it's being an only child—tied to your mother's apron-strings. You could *do* things . . . it's wicked!"

Her blunt candor was effaced by the passion in her protest. It precipitated him into her version, unsteadied him, quickened the misgivings that were always on the verge of perishing. And then as quickly he blazed to defense. She was only a girl, a student at South Kensington! What *could* she know of all that past beauty? Creation! Why, that was creation—at its roots! "I don't know what you mean by creation. It's hard to get away from it. This book—my father began it, it's trying to prove the Roman foundation of Lenne, pure hypothesis in a way, but you've no idea how interesting it is . . ." he was trying to prove the case to himself as much as to her, "I say, they were creators!"

"Yes—in their own time. That doesn't make you one in yours!" She scored her points, eager to convince him. "Roman, Visigoth, Adam and Eve . . . it's all one!"

"It isn't really . . ."

"Oh, I know quite well," she interrupted impatiently, "it's all one to you! But you wouldn't be English if you didn't get hot on the Roman trail. It's fatal. You'll be going to Italy next, like Doctor Thatcher, you'll have all the engravings!"

He walked on in silence. She had absolutely no right to be angry. But her words leavened the bread of his duty towards his father. His comprehension rose in a flash to understanding that made him see the future, a middle-age lit by this archæological passion. But he did not reveal himself to her. He gave a parrot's worth of words. "You're very down on the Roman."

She laughed, remembered talks, sharp as intaglios, in the South Kensington Common Room. "I'm on the side of the Normans!"

He had her there! The other side of the coin she blamed him for spending. "William the Conqueror!"

"Oh, don't!" she cried back at him, "I didn't mean *that* at all . . . they hardly left anything." And what they did leave, she reasoned afterwards beneath her laughter was impalpable as an influence. She was vexed with herself because of all this argument that had happened between them. She did not want to argue, but to rouse him, shake him into a manifestation of the forces she believed to be within him. He moved her in the same way as Valerie Bell . . . the same earnestness, and when you dug thought out of him he always gave you something that had been turned over, examined, and made clean. Instead of building he was burying himself in the past. It was all very well for Dorcas to say that he was "full of promise" and "that many a bag of promise had burst before it was sown!" Dorcas hadn't her faith in people. She never expected anything, she always took you

as you were . . . a sort of daily bread and be thankful! She was glad she wasn't like that. It would have closed down a whole world of dreams. . . . "Look at those sheep!" she said suddenly, "against the sky . . . they look as if they had fallen." Clouds on the grass, her thoughts continued. He was looking at the sheep as though they were something wonderful. He's ridiculously obedient, she admitted to herself . . . absurd . . . absurd. "It's been jolly getting to know you —again."

"Yes, hasn't it?" he answered warmly.

And all the time something that ought to have been cleared away hung between them. I wish she'd thrash the matter out, he thought, she's a real woman—making a mad disturbance and going off in the midst of it. . . .

He did not see her again alone. A letter came from Dr. Pledge asking him to breakfast to talk over his work, and he had spent the Sunday morning with his mother. They had visitors when he got there. She sat against Dr. Thatcher's lace curtains, her hands clasped round her knee, maintaining a smiling silence in the midst of talk that went like a pair of scissors, clip, clip . . . climates, a châlet in Switzerland where they kept goats, somebody whose house had been burned down in Ireland . . . Dorcas's hands busy over the teacups. Wilfrid and himself, taking and passing . . . When he told her he was going back to Lenne that evening she merely made a sort of "yim" with her lips and looked away from him as if it

was a nuisance. He felt like a waiter—holding the plate of chocolate cake—at her mercy. And afterwards she talked quite a lot to the Irish girl. . . .

He was late for tea. His mother did not seem to notice. She was much better. The stiffness in her neck had almost gone so that she could move her head a little and not strive until her eyes looked as if they would burst from the pressure. She made him promise to go to a tailor.

"Don't get a light suit . . . it isn't serviceable . . . you look very nice in something dark. What about your shirts?"

"Mrs. Capgrave sees to those things," he answered casually; "she does my mending." He had been trying, ever since yesterday to tell her about his talk with Isabel Beggary. The more he thought about it, the more he weakened in his defiance. The girl was right—he was drugging his endeavor. It was only for the sake of the book that he had applied for a mastership in Lenne, and now that he had got the mastership he was tied there . . . serving his apprenticeship! As if the ideas he smothered in his mind were tricks in a trade. By the time he would be free there wouldn't be any ideas!

"Tell your Mrs. Capgrave, I am most grateful . . . it is a great relief to me." She could almost see the little two-storied house in a two-storied street, and the plain sensible woman who looked after him so conscientiously. She had asked him once to tell her what his room was like—an

ordinary little sitting-room with furniture upholstered in atrocious red plush . . . table in center . . . he had his meals at one end . . . good fires. . . . Yes! It was a great relief to her. "You've filled out—but you're the lean sort, like your father." She tried to remember Horace—before her marriage. Much, much better looking Stephen was. There was something of herself in Stephen, a delicacy. Horace kept his head back better and his eyes were deeper set as well as different in color. They had the same fidgety, long-fingered hands.

He wondered, if he told her, would she let him off with the book! Would she say gently, well, Stephen, it doesn't matter. If it isn't to be finished, it isn't. He could not conceive her answer. All he could think of when he tried for her attitude was her stiff tragic figure with the manuscript in her hand, standing by his father's desk on the day of the funeral: "And now, it will never be finished!" Good heavens! He was a fool to make such a fuss. He knew enough. Why couldn't he get on with the damned thing and get it done? He *was* getting on quite well—all the signs were with him, until Isabel Beggary came along with her passionate pleading, tearing at strings he had muted most successfully, waking everything up that was going comfortably to sleep . . . "On the side of the Normans!" She would be! A feminine lot quivering with perishable beauty. What had they left but a few gateposts through which had once poured a vision that

lifted some man's spirit to Paradise. They were too soft, too plastic. . . . The Romans knew how to harden the heart into something that could endure.

Something is troubling him. She was watching him intently. It was since he began to go over to the Ropers. The girl, of course! "Is Mrs. Roper's sister staying long?"

He looked up, convinced that she was reading his thoughts, "Isabel Beggary? Only for the holidays, I believe!" He had never asked her, and now that the point-blank question had arisen he wasn't quite sure. For a moment he hoped that she would go back—and stay there, at any rate until he got ahead with the book. He wanted frightfully to meet her again. . . . He couldn't bear the patient earnestness of his mother's expression. "I say, Mother, I think I'll chuck this tailor idea and spend the money on a season ticket instead. . . . I wish Doctor Pledge would increase my screw. I'm engaged as Junior, but I'm not doing Junior's work."

"I'd rather you got the suit," she said slowly. A thought like pain darted through her—he wants to keep up with the Ropers. Oh! He mustn't think of *that* yet . . . he's too young. But of course, she couldn't prevent him from being attracted. . . . He was out there, in a world utterly beyond her reach, open to any temptation. She didn't mind marriage—it would come—but a silly, flippant girl . . . he was late for tea. In another couple of hours he would be gone. . . .

"Steevie dear, do sit down . . . you didn't finish telling me about the Eskurians . . ."

He moved across from the lighted part of the room into the shadows, to the chair beside her. It was no use. . . . His mind began to formulate the ideas he was going to explain to her—ideas that were half-stale, exposed to the hard sunlight of a girl's laughter. What did the old world matter? He was young. His mother was old. The reading-lamp divided the room into two hemispheres. And in the gloom their thoughts shone silently as stars. . . .

In the train, the old remorse came back. His freedom was shaken, flicked like the lights that flashed into the dark speed of the train, glimmers in the passage—the future was a tunnel.

He was glad that the night was well down on Lenne by the time the train arrived there. The shuttered shops were blind, like himself, in the old town that his father's aim had turned into a sedulous station in his mind's earthly pilgrimage. There was a light in the parlor at Number 9, so instead of using his latchkey, he knocked. He did not mean it to be a loud knock but it was: it positively rattled along all the knockers in the street. He was not surprised when Mrs. Capgrave stared at him as though he were a burglar. "I've come back earlier than I meant. There wasn't time. . . . I ought to have written."

She pulled him out of the ditch of stumbling excuses. "Come in, I'm glad you've come." Her heart knew her full sincerity, then sank in trepida-

tion. The room was not as an oven with the fire she had stacked so extravagantly. The blazing roar vexed her economic tranquility. But the annoyance it gave her eased her numb senses because it comforted her—a burning ghost of her normality—with assurance that she was not quite mad. But, if this went on, she told herself, before his knock came, she would be walking down the street with the feather duster in her hair, crying out to the innocent ships to come home, come home. . . . "I've been sitting here. I've set the kitchen fire for the morning. . . ." She thought she might as well make her actions appear valid.

"So I see. Don't let me disturb you. I'll go straight . . ."

"You'll have your supper," she remarked in a severe tone—as if he was ten and was going to be spanked afterwards.

"But really . . ."

"But really nothing. I'll have some too. . . . I'd forgotten. It will be an excuse."

"Oh, look here! I can't turn you out, you—you must bring it in here." She looked at him as though he had said something awful, something that needed to be weighed and measured and reckoned with. And her "I will," sounded as if he had forced her compliance from the depths of suspicion.

How could he know, her thoughts asked, as she mixed the cocoa, that his arrival had saved her from a threat of wildness! She could not have

endured another night like the nights she had been having.

And yet, no sooner had the door closed upon him, the afternoon he went off, than she had clasped her hands and almost screamed out with relief . . . the cry stopped at the door of her lips—"O Harry! The house is our own again . . . yours and mine . . . there Love!" She wanted to make him feel that he could sleep, now, in peace, in her heart . . . that he could never really be cold or desolate so long as her warm living love was as a cloak about him. She had gone into the kitchen and put on a clean apron, just as if he was going to come home to tea . . . that mast with the buckled sail out there might easily have been the *Hicafric's* wraith come to pilot the winter dusk . . . and then when she turned, it seemed that for an instant blessed with fire, he was there—his arms outspread, his murmured endearments dropping a canopy of love upon her head. . . . There was only the darkening emptiness. . . . She had gone upstairs touching the banisters as in a dream—climbing, climbing. If only she could climb to Heaven! Keep him, dear Lord, keep him, she prayed, keep his soul strong and brave as he loved it to be! She imagined him, with all his faults wiped away, and the completest understanding between them. Nothing was hidden from him now. He knew all her failings . . . he could see her, regarding her image in the mirror wondering why he had loved her. She tried to

look as she looked when his face was bent close upon her, and was frightened by the pity that welled in her at her own reflection. Oh, you poor unfortunate woman, her thoughts mocked. Perhaps it was the twilight—lifting her face clear of her body like that, making a mask of it, a mask of pain! She had to move her hands to make quite sure the rest of her was there. She left the mirror and leaned against the chest of drawers, and took the Bible down and opened it at random. She had to go to the window with it because it was too dark to see. "And that thou shouldst discern the paths to the house thereof? Doubtless thou knowest, for thou was then born." It was like a cynical voice taunting her through the window-pane. He would never discern the paths to her house again . . . doubtless thou knowest . . . she knew all there was to know! Gray grief, and the promise of grief, the chill blast across her heart . . . she would never know joy again until she came to die. And death would be an ecstasy, for he would be waiting . . . a fisherman like the rest of them from Lake Galilee, the salt-spume upon their beards, the seas' vastness in their gaze wading up upon the shores of the world . . . the Lord knew quite well what He was doing when He chose them. Men who drew their breath from wonder and were meant to win people, for the magic in their eyes would rouse any soul to passion. She would have followed Harry anywhere —even to the depths of the sea! If only she had been there, she would have gone down without

the slightest fear. . . . She raised the book again, seeking the solace she was certain to find. "Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the salt land his dwelling-place." Ah! The taunting voice had ceased. This was the voice of truth! The wilderness of the sea—his home was there. There not *here*. Oh, my dear, I am here alone! The silence affirmed it . . . the cold, bitter silence . . . down in the narrow street a shadowy lamplighter was going round with a star upon a pole. Windows were alight, children within, men would be coming home. She saw them—dark and upright with bowed heads in the midst of greeting arms. When Miss Mundesley gave her the free ticket to go to "Julius Cæsar" she was roused to pride and stripped into humility by the power and miracle of human arms. When the crowd cried to Brutus, their arms went up like branches resprung from the windy storm of their wills. . . . She felt sorry for mankind which had this power and so seldom used it; yet glad, because evil men could use it too, to break a faith or spread a pestilence. In the darkness the white boxlike square of the bed shone against the dim rails on which she knew was hung the shell-covered shield with the plush center on which Harry used to hang his watch. His head would never bruise her pillow again . . . always, on the day of his return she carried up the fresh clean sheets, the shiny lineny ones Miss Hermione had given her for a wedding present, and she made the bed so carefully with a sort of shy fear in her heart that made her ask

God to make her his . . . every time she brought the same prayer to God.

The darkness was cruel. And yet, buried in its opacity, the expectation of some token or vision of Harry was ready to kindle and come to life. Because of this the brightening street afflicted her. It was like the time in Saint Dukas' she had slipped in. A winter's evening, in the quiet rapt air the chancel was marked by a mysterious promise of revelation. Behind the curtain of the darkness anything might have happened. And then a man came along like a thief in the night and lit some candles and there was only the plain altar-cloth upon the soapstone.

The knife slipped through the crust and scathed her thumb. O my God! she moaned, it is terrible, terrible! She had treasured the thought of holidays . . . and nothing had come to her but a memory of Harry resembling a mold that was bound to shape her mind through all the future to this dire yearning, and hunger and thirst. She could never go into the room again without its coming. She had cried out for bread and no communion had come to her! And the nights had been worse. The same agony blinded and tortured by the same silence. In the end she had wrung her hands and gone from room to room . . . she had been driven into Mr. Host's parlor. She didn't care what he thought. What could he think! That queer book turned down on the table—*Phédre*! She couldn't read a word of it. She had taken it out to check her eyes and choke

her thoughts away from that evening . . . the fuchsias hanging purple trumpets. . . . Harry had come to her father's door.

"I'm afraid there's nothing but bread and butter," she apologized to Mr. Host, as she entered the parlor; "I meant to get something in to-morrow."

His face looked as if he had not heard. "I—I hope you had a nice Christmas!"

She gazed back at him. "I was alone." She remembered her kitchen table that day. She could see the table in Mrs. Host's kitchen stacked with mince-pies, the row of puddings, figs in boxes, the crystallized candies, apples. . . . In another moment she would have been laughing like somebody taken leave of their senses. "I made no fuss of it," she said, giving him the dull outside truth. Her hands were not quite steady as she laid out the tray.

"I see you've been . . . do you know French?"

"Not a word. I just took the book out without looking at it."

He absolved her of all pretense to learning. She had not struck him certainly as the sort who would open Racine for the joy of the thing. But to find the book, fresh from her opening, upon the table reflected upon the honesty she had always shown him. He took the cup and saucer from her, convinced of her simple integrity. "See . . . where were you sitting? Here wasn't it?" He indicated the armchair.

"You sit there . . . it's your seat."

"It's your furniture," he laughed, and waited for her to sit down.

She would not. She sat down by the tray. "And don't you pay me to use it!"

"Yes. Quite so."

Now, what had she done! It was just as if she had slapped the word lodger across his expression. He was more a redeemer than a lodger! Suddenly she swelled into conscious gratitude for his presence. He must not go away. She would do everything in her power—"I'm glad you're back. You—you must get on with your book."

"Yes." He avoided her eyes.

"It must be a sort of pleasure to be writing a book about a lovely place like this—you have to know Lenne to. . . ."

"You have!" he interrupted. His voice had a hard ring. As he looked across at her it occurred to him that she had the same passion for place as his father. His father without the learning—the feminine reversion—emotion for intellect. She would see the sunlight on the stone where his father saw the age. "You're very interested?"

It was a question, but something lay beneath it that made her hesitate. "I love Lenne. I have cause to."

For no tangible reason he saw her outlined against the black flints of Saint Dukas'. The town must have generated women like her through every period . . . religious, keeping up the soul, the spiritual values. "You may not like my book," he said slowly, "when it's finished."

She missed his scepticism. "I am sure I shall like it." She wanted to tell him that it would be, in a way, precious to her, like an encrusted chalice —the precious stones of the place in which she had eaten the bread of love. But she could not string the words to her meaning. He was looking so sad, his lips against the rim of the cup, that she said instead: "You mustn't despair. The finest work is hardest wrought!"

There was something akin, but too frightened for faith in his eyes. "Thank you."

The moment bled between them, drop on drop of quiet sympathy. The poor thing! She thought, he's afraid. And the devotion she had already pledged him blossomed into flower from his discovered need. But nothing on his part could ever out-balance her own stringent necessity. The debt would be always on her side. "I must tell you . . ." she confessed slowly, "that I want to help you all I can, I"—she put her hand up to stem his interruption—"I—I owe it to you!"

"Owe it to . . ."

"Yes. You can't guess . . . but . . . I can't bear the . . . the house is so empty. . . ." Her effort would not quicken into speech.

He saw her suddenly. Her intense isolation. It was like the isolation of his mother.

CHAPTER IV

IT was not in Annie Capgrave's nature to do things without fervor. She may have been unlearned as Stephen Host defined her, but the passionate endeavor that she applied to the simple and intimate activities of her life strained her soul to vision, so that there was granted to her from small things, the golden ardor that is often not achieved from larger aims. She took life as an embrace, on the lips, training her deep heart to meet its wounds. But there was one grief to which the wild heart would not yield. Her spirit lost its focus—seeing two things! For a time she saw neither of them whole.

On the day after Stephen Host's return she seemed to have reached asylum. The worst was over! The suffering was well sown. Nothing could ever spring from her again that would not be mixed with the fruit of that seed. Bereavement and the black thoughts of dereliction, she had known these! And she, who had always cried out for more than God was prepared to give her, had cried enough! Enough! She was as ripe for compassion as any flayed martyr for initiation when Stephen Host laid bare his difficulty. For, of course, he was bound to tell her! Her trite words, "the finest work is hardest wrought," had

struck a bell in him that kept ringing. Neither his mother, with her tragic desire to see him express the fulfilment his father, although he took a lifetime to do it, had failed to achieve; nor Isabel Beggary with her warm bright impulsion, penetrating his inhibitions, struck at the stark truth of his effort with a gleam like that—the hard labor that chained him like a slave. Nobody gave him credit for that, except Mrs. Capgrave; the paid-with-thanks Annie Capgrave, his landlady, who was not stupid at all, but a very lonely woman. He hardly needed to explain about his mother. She knew at once. "Isn't it natural," she said simply, "if she loved him—and loving you she chose you. . . ." It seemed to him the simplest thing in the world, as she said it, and her "I should be proud to do it!" lifted the whole affair on to a level that made it a religious and valiant deed . . . primitive monks building a bridge to reward the graciousness of some saint . . . "I am, at times."

"I know. The first time you mentioned it you were—a kind of excited." She recalled how his self-possessed enthusiasm had excluded her, and made her feel that she had no right hardly to be in her own home. She had never hated doing anything herself. There had been hateful things to do . . . all her childhood, when most girls were playing, she was peeling potatoes, washing her father's socks, turning mattresses too heavy for her . . . she had transfused the struggle into something that ended in conquest in her soul. She had

had her ecstacies. That wild pansy she had grown in the cream jug! She could see it still, with its single blossom against the open window, its tiny leaves, all at one side, held up like plates to catch the gold dusty air . . . beyond the square of cloudy sky edged by the tops of the red and white dales in the grove . . . the husky chatter of the daws. Life had miraculous moments from which you came back with a—a sort of pity for the rest of the world! That was where God came in!

He was very frank with her. "I have these misgivings. I want to be doing something of my own!"

"But we can make anything our own!"

"Well, yes, in a way, but"—he remembered Isabel Beggary—"certain things are not quite like . . ." for the life of him he could think of no analogy that would fit his conception of her version of making things one's own.

She put her finger, as it were, upon the root of the trouble, "It isn't as if you were doing it for money."

"Ah, that's just it." If he were he could have let rip and not flogged himself to care. "That's why . . . oh, you don't realize!" he exclaimed with impatience, "it's because I've got to care . . . I can't pretend to—see lynchets, boundaries."

Well, if he hadn't to pretend it was done for love of his mother, what was wrong with him? "Don't you like writing?" Miss Mundesley

hated teaching and always wanted to be a tennis-champion.

"I do. I want to write something of my own." Isabel Beggary's urgency came back upon him. "I want to create something." Her absorbent eyes were stretching him like a piece of gauze in which she could see his motives like flies in a mesh. He could hide nothing. "The fact is, when I was home, I met a girl. . ." he did not say "who put the fear of the Lord into me," although it was what he meant, "who made me realize that I might be making a hash of things. I ought to be trying to do what I *can* do . . . not trying to—to please other people."

"But your own mother! There is always time!" Even as she said it she wondered. She had put off her marriage because of her father. Looking back, in that instant, she saw that there was not any of Harry's love to be spared—even for her father! But she had loved her father too . . . when they took her to the field by the corner of the road where he had been run over, she lifted the limp hand out of the red-stained daisies. . . . Yes, she was glad she had put it off—glad she had stayed. "Believe me," she assured him, the wisdom of experience beating like a pulse in the words, "believe me, you'll never regret serving your mother. Don't mind a girl! What could a young girl know?"

He had said that to himself. She was only a girl. Her brown sunniness, her form keeping rhythmic time with his shadow across the green

stretch of the links! Only a girl! But by Jove! she knew more than his mother and Mrs. Capgrave put together. She had a girl's ease as she stuck up for her Normans. Of course, she was wrong. "Yes, I suppose you're right . . . duty its own reward!"

She saw nothing to make a joke about. "You write your book. Don't shirk it. You'll love it before you've finished with it—you'll love Lenne!"

The maps he had drawn made a little pile of clipped papers on the corner of the table. He held them up to her. "You've done me good. I'll hold on, and when I've finished I'll present you with these to light your fires!" He was glad she knew. It fixed her understanding like a support into his daily effort. It made her a watchman! Watchman, what of the night? Not the Night but the Roman Occupation! Every time she peeped in at him he would think of that. The brown hot water-can—the way her wrist rested upon the handle—it might have been an emphorae, and she—some woman from the Tuscany marshes whose husband had gone down in the—the *Mare Magnum* . . . the way she was championing the cause of Rome!

She was rewarded by his acknowledgment of her encouragement. But it puzzled her to imagine the state of mind that could grow despondent because of something that had not yet been done. It was turning what one actually accomplished into a means that was almost predestined to fail. She

had never done that. She gathered every day fresh, like manna, seeing in it the form of its own joy or pain. And in the broad scheme of the affairs of living she tried always to do her best. It was foolish for any human being to plan more than that. But there! The ways of human beings would torture the heart out of God himself. "If you work hard you'll have it done in no time," she said hopefully, "one job at a time."

Archæology wasn't a matter of "no time": it was a matter of Time from the beginning. He felt dreadfully flippant, as if she had played some stale joke upon him that was infused with new mirth. By way of revenge he wanted to tease her about something neolithic that she couldn't understand. But he could think of nothing but boxes in a back-garden, and an American-looking man in gold-rimmed spectacles, writing enthusiastically in a flat note-book, india paper, steel-headed pencil, clay in his nails. . . . "Oh, life's frightfully funny!" he exclaimed with an air that closed the conversation.

He's very young or he wouldn't say that, she thought, and refrained from disputing the statement. Knowledge made people light-headed. She had seen Miss Hermione dancing in the broad path that went down to the lake. And what Miss Hermione didn't know wasn't worth knowing.

But there he was! She had meant to manifest the fullest gratitude, and before a complete day had passed, he had fermented her intentions with a comprehension of his own outlook that shook

her from the servitude of mere thanks into a devotion that was newly bounded by equality. She wove him into the threads of her being and made him part of the daily pattern of which she could never see further than what was already done. Going about her shopping or to Potiphar her eye would catch vistas of the old town, the old, poor town, the river, the gray streets behind the Bede House and she would think to herself—he's seen that too! She saw men, four-breasted, marching through the streets, clad in the girdled jumper of the man in the chariot, very white, with shining weapons . . . and then she would think of the climate and wonder, until wonder became a puzzle how they kept their legs clean. She tried not to think of Harry—outside her prayers, and these were passionate with her unison with him. She believed that, no matter what she did now, existence would silt up at the end of everything, into her death-meeting with him. Her faith stopped at eternity . . . a moment, or forever, so long as it was complete! She would live as perfectly as she could, be charitable—even to the girl next door who continually vexed her with her syncopated visits to the dust-bin, and never mind the baker boy's habit of forgetting the odd farthing on her four-three loaf. And gradually, steadily, out of the gloom and mourning, came a numbness that at least, let her alone. Time was marked in her house by Mr. Host's meals. The interest she struggled to achieve in concerns outside the realm of her poor emotions, were marked by his

progress. Whenever he had a good day, then it was a good day for her too, a witnessed truth that she was of some use in the world.

Until the telegram came. The morning the telegram came she was almost happy, almost at peace. It was a bright February morning full of yellow, heatless light. She was polishing the knocker brass when the boy on the red bicycle stopped. "Host." He held the burnt-orange slip out to her. Harry had always sent her telegrams from Southampton, Liverpool, Cardiff—wherever it was. . . .

She guessed instantly, by his expression, that it was bad news about his mother, and that he would have to go. "I wish I could go with you and help," she offered sincerely, "but I expect she is well looked after."

He was ramming the brown parcel of clean collars and socks that she had made up for him, into his pocket. "There's only Mrs. Singleton," he confided, "she lives in the cottage next door. She sleeps in now. . . ." He was looking frantically about for his hat which was on the table right in front of him where she had put it.

"They wouldn't like me—an outsider! But, if ever you're in need of somebody I'll come!" She was trying to be cheerful because of his trouble, but dread drove her to revelation. "Send for me at once. It would be a kindness to have me."

"A kindness?" he repeated. She had an odd way of putting it.

"More than a kindness—a mercy!" She had

no right to keep him waiting, regarding her as if she was a porter at a ticket barrier who wouldn't punch his ticket. Quickly she got it out, feeling unconsciously that he was too flurried to listen to half of what she was saying. "I'm frightened to death of being in the house alone!"

"Burglars! Phew! There's no fear of that!"

She could not let him pass her with a misunderstanding between them. "I'm not afraid of burglars—it's . . ."

"It's what then?" He asked brusquely, and was arrested. She looked haunted, scared. "What is it, Mrs. Capgrave?" His voice was as tender as if he were speaking to his mother.

His tenderness broke her more than a sword. "It's my husband. . . ."

"But you don't believe in ghosts!"

"I wish I could see his ghost . . . it's . . ." Oh! he was in a great hurry. "I can't tell you. Perhaps, if anything happens to your mother, you'll know . . . seeing her there in the rooms where she used to be, wanting her and . . . nothing, not a sound . . . it drives me crazy."

In the second's tension their minds met and, if hers alone knelt, his was bowed before a significant reality—a shrine where human suffering had an altar. He looked at her in silence. What could he say?

She watched him go up the street, not really seeing him, but afraid to break the spell by moving. She had the exaltation of one who has won a votary. She had appealed! Not a word had he

spoken—offered her no kindness. His eyes had suddenly changed—become gnostic, seen the sphere of sorrow wherein her soul kept its orbit. Between them, now, contact would never be plain again. It had been made fecund from her pain. He would never again be just her lodger—her merciful lodger. There would be that between them that would temper the mercy of his presence in her house. She felt dimly, for the first time putting the period in which she had known him in review, that he must have blamed her . . . indeed she had been stupid! She had not meant to make a conundrum of herself, for God knows the world was too full of problems.

He could not rid himself of the consciousness of heart-break in her eyes. The Aeschylus he had brought to read in the train but made him think of her the more. Women went astray with grief—and love. He thought of her, solitary in her house. All those seafaring relics she had stuffed into her parlor were enough to drive her demented with their perpetual reminder. She ought to store them away. He'd suggest it to her. Something oriental in her loyalty! He compared her with Clytemnestra, and the quality of her single-mindedness reduced the riper and more subtle woman to terms that the daily press would put in large captions. The Greeks made a play of tragedy. They must have been very happy. We had grown less pitiless and more pitiful. Christ hanging on the Cross had lasted a long time, plus human sin and the guilty conscience . . . it was

no wonder that the majority of mankind took to trade . . . every town and hamlet was mapped to nest the butcher and the baker and the candlestick maker; with the church spire rising like a needle to sew up rents that disturbed the civic texture. He wasn't a Nietzschean, but—well, there was that side of the picture! The train, rushing through open tunnels of rock, gray as syenite, cooled his mind, from its flare about his mother and that strange white moment of Mrs. Capgrave's secret, into cynicism. Youth has to be hard, or blind. Isabel Beggary was neither hard nor blind but brutally honest. She said he had been tied to his mother's apron-strings, and it was true. But a man could not desert his mother. If she had not been alone—if he had had brothers or sisters, he could have gone off knowing that her days would not be left empty by his absence. But, under the circumstances he couldn't have left her. He believed Mrs. Capgrave when she assured him that he would not regret it. No, he wouldn't regret it. Her present illness convinced him that he had done right. Everything was a fight with one's conscience.

And, as usual, these on-the-eve trepidations vanished immediately he saw her. Mrs. Singleton explained to him that she had had another stroke, and rallied. It was as he expected.

"But"—Mrs. Singleton's expression took it for granted that he had no feelings—"although she is out of danger, she can't speak."

"I'll be most careful. I'll not let her . . ."

"She's dumb!" The interruption was as abrupt as it could be.

He glued his eyes on the photographs of the Hadrian coins for a second. When he looked at her again, he noticed how straggly and untidy her gray hair was, wisps falling over her ears. She looked in need of a wash. Poor old girl! He owed her a lot! "I say, I expect you've been having a terrible time!"

"I have . . . all night. She was nearly gone once. It isn't so much the pain . . . she struggles. She'd have been dead long ago, Doctor Roper says . . . it makes it hard for her."

Her will there—behind the siege of her body! It was dreadful—worse than death! It crumbled the most vital part of her. He wished she could die, quietly, without pain. Mrs. Singleton thought he didn't see. He saw too clearly. She was tired, poor old faithful creature. "You've been up all night! Wouldn't you rest, now that I'm here?"

"No, I'd rather not . . . I'm quite awake now. I'll try to have a good sleep the early part of the night—if you sit up with her?"

"Why, of course!"

He insisted upon taking entire charge when the night came. It was a real battle of determinations between him and Mrs. Singleton. But she had to surrender. She was amazed at what she called the mastership coming out in him. "There now! Who could have believed it!" He went up a hundred degrees in her estimation. But her approval was three parts gratification because this

manifestation of devotion would please his mother.

To his mother his vigil became torture. She read him through that night to the very roots of his being. . . .

He had been well primed by Dr. Roper. He sat, where she could see him without strain; he watched her with the cat's proverbial sharpness, missing nothing. He did not offer her the wrong things, but noticed carefully the way her eyelids flickered as he pointed them out to her. It was not the things he did for her that agitated her, but the things he did not think she saw, because her closed eyes, when he looked, cheated him. She would open them when he wasn't looking. . . . The night was like every night in her life piled into one heap without the calm of relaxation, burning like greenwood, alive, yet perishing . . . she thought it would never pass. The short doze that came with the winter's morning was like slipping into a pool—her spirits, a charred cinder, ceasing to burn. She did not notice at the beginning. He had the same devoted attention as Mrs. Singleton. She was worried only because he was losing his night's rest. And he hadn't told her—she could not ask him—how long his leave of absence was. She hated to think of his going back in the morning to those fidgety boys. He was altering, she thought; his mouth closed more firmly, his eyes were more settled—not so wild. His mind, perhaps, was not roving so much. When he took the elastic-banded note-

book, that contained his Roman foundation notes, out of his pocket, she was comforted to think that *that* was why. He had something definite to *do*, something that would give his ideas form—weed his brain out for his own maturity. He had greater gifts than his father! She had dwelt upon those talks of his, during the Christmas holidays, until she was convinced. She had wanted to tell him, once, but she was too tired. She meant to tell him. She would tell him—when she recovered from this attack. It was a good thing her heart was strong. She shut her eyes. And when she opened them she saw that he had been looking at her. He turned the leaves up quickly, searching. It did her good to see. . . . And then, like a mockery of gladness in her mind, she caught a gesture . . . his hand—the way it shut the book, held it limply; his profile, with all that had gladdened her washed out of it. Despair was painted upon it, as if lodged for good. It told her, in the shaded, hateful stillness that he had no hope. Oh, she was wrong! She was wrong! Her heart cried mutely, My dear Steevie, it doesn't matter. I can see now that you will find something fitter to do! But he couldn't hear! He couldn't hear! Her desire was punishing him. And, when she realized it, her love for him as a mother trebled from protection and guidance into passionate pride. One must suffer the full power of love, or of hatred, for those one has manacled. There is no in-between stage. She suffered the full power, then dumbly—only her poor tired will

moving like a broken operating string behind her limbs and features. Her smarting eyes were too dry for tears. She tried to swell her next look to him with all she was feeling, but he looked away as if—as if she had hurt him. She, who had borne and cradled him! She had made mistakes! But he was old enough for justice and forgiveness. He would understand—when she told him. She willed him to put the book out of his mind.

Her longing to put her arms round him, when she took the sips on her parched lips, was breaking her. She felt certain the bones would crack in her numb flesh and let her spirit out to him. Nothing happened, only the overwhelming quiet, the red-hot glow of the fire, the brass beading on the mantel-piece, the lusters dangling their bright prisms. She shut her eyes. It was then after eternal minutes that drowsiness came. She opened them, frightened, upon Stephen stretched in the deep chair, his tipped fingers making a roof under his meditative face. She thought ridiculously of —"Here's the Church, and here's the steeple! Open the door and see the people!" He was about five when she taught him that, lisping the miracle with eyes shining with that wild eagerness that had lasted ever since—that was beginning to go. It was the secret of her sternness, her invincible resolve to mold him. He was the roving sort. She was so afraid for him—those bursts and impulses! Music, when he heard somebody play a Russian concerto at Hunton; art, after he had been to Norwich with his

father and read the book on Crome . . . seen Constable's "Hay-wain" . . . and then that group of Cambridge rationalists and poets! She had to tie him down. He was led by every wind. She saw plainly, separated from the desire she had wrought upon him, that she had led him to a junior mastership in a secondary school! And, looking at him, with her dumbness sharpening every faculty of observation she could muster, she saw that he was worth more than that! The instincts of youth were just the shape of the soul showing—inalterable. No matter what you poured in upon it, the shape remained!

The lamplight faded. The darkness lightened and fused with the illuminated part of the room and gave it a spent and weary appearance. Gray ashes showed in the fender. The fire needed clearing out. Stephen was yawning when Mrs. Singleton entered the room. She was smiling, feeling a great kindness for them both, a great gratitude. But they did not see her smile, because it was made rigid by the mask of her face.

Ah, well! She had not altered the shape. She had poured the wrong wine in, pressed false grapes—it would turn sour, and he would throw it out. And all would be well with another harvest.

He came down, looking fresher for a bath. There was a lovely tenderness in his eyes. "Well, Mother, it's rotten, but I've got to go. I shall be late for my class, but they expect me. I'll be down early on Friday evening for the week-end."

He smiled, knowing the argument that was sure to rise in her mind. "Blow the expense. . . . I want to be with you. That's all that counts!"

On the way to the station he sent a telegram to Mrs. Capgrave, asking her to come—at once. Her request was granted. He had had it out with Mrs. Singleton, and left the firmest of instructions. He prided himself on the presence of mind that made him end his telegram with the statement that he would get his meals out in Lenne. Mrs. Capgrave would need that!

She read his telegram with a sort of joy. . . . She left the fire alight and made up—a red core of warmth welcomed him, and a note for him, pinned on the check table-cloth where he would be sure to see it. "I've cooked a pound of sausages and left enough bread and butter in. I've put the tin under the table. I've also laid your tray, as you will see. So if you care to boil the kettle on the gas-ring, mornings, you can have your breakfasts in. It will save you going out. You'll have to boil it for your shaving-water, in any case. Annie Capgrave." "Nothing at all about herself!" he muttered. This was action in earnest. Her strict obedience moved him as a profound proof of the terror that could drive her forth so easily. He was always finding himself realizing that she had told him the truth. He understood her desolation even more, before the evening was done. For, shut up in the quiet house, he felt bored to death. The night with his mother had, at least, been blessed by her presence, and broken

by his services. But Mrs. Capgrave's house was a vault in which outward and visible signs of her were buried. He would have greeted her with a shout if she had put her head in to interrupt him and make his compass shake in the midst of "here went a Saxon road." He went to bed early and could not sleep, read until he could read no longer; smoked—and thought of Isabel Beggary! He hoped, in a sudden leap of promise that he might see her at the week-end. The chances were that she would not be down again until Easter. He praised Heaven because Easter would be early that year—at the beginning of April. A few more weeks. He'd make her talk! He felt quite excited about it—like one of those old debates! Davoren on the æsthetic side, "The thing didn't matter . . . cloth-of-gold roses or a hurdle—it was the beam of the artist's instinct." He'd tell her that! The roses were a favorite with Davoren—his Californian relations, of course! Craik, the Roman Catholic, saying, "That once one got to heaven, if one found that God was a chair it would not alter the reality of God!" And Davoren capping that with, "the difference lay in The personality of the new arrival, Joseph the Carpenter or Van Gogh!" The monists hadn't a look-in when those two got sparring. Davoren's room, with the tea-chests and the Indian matting—he had tea there once, out of a jam-jar when the cups didn't go round . . . he spent all his money on pictures. Dickinson still wrote to him—his passion for fifth-century script

had not abated. Poor old myopic Dickinson, with his zeal for script that was all ees and yees. His fine long nose looked as if it had been specially created to poke in faded and adorned manuscripts. He ought to have been a mediæval monk. Instead of which he was grubbing in a ship-broker's! Ah, what one ought to be—himself, for instance! To take the job that came easily was Safety First. Isabel Beggary would advocate risk with as much passion as if risk were analogous with salvation. Perhaps it was—ultimate and integral salvation. And yet her own cry, "I've got my living to earn," pointed to reservations. Did she stand for something different for herself from the creed she applied to others? He would probe her when they met. To find her out in lack of logic struck him as finding her out in a deceit. He felt, under his skin, that you could never be sure of her, not in the way that one could be sure of his mother—or people like Mrs. Capgrave. He saw her head go up, as it went up when she said "Yim!" Independent? Yes, and reckless! It reminded him of Davoren's "The Devil!" when he missed something he wanted.

As he came down the street the next evening on his way from school it occurred to him that he had never before noticed its meanness, its slaggy line of poor houses sloping to a puddle-like vision of the river. The fact that the house would be cold and dull and deserted drove him to see its externals as he had never before seen

them. And the seeing was depressing. He imagined the district struggling up from the water through years and years of the town's making. Baked cottages at first, well-beamed, occupied by men who served the early merchants. When these crumbled, the servitors of a later breed of employers dabbling in the old Hanse towns of the Baltic, led up to these atrocities of the eighteen-hundreds . . . Wesley instead of the old Benedictines brawling in the streets . . . these midland-class people instead of the stockingless folk with a great sunburnt faith upon their faces. Bah, the muck of progress! The sediment thickened as the population grew . . . the Manchester programme was no better than a cheap silk banner hung in a Temperance Hall. Life, for the multitude, was an affair of cheap silk banners. . . .

The new awareness of the place she lived in, that had been made manifest by her absence, enlarged his knowledge of Mrs. Capgrave. It magnified her generosity, made her a splendid misfit in her environment. She became different.

He met her with this new consciousness in his mind, and was puzzled to find her unchanged. The eyes she cast upon him still wore that look of emptiness that made her expression so grave that one had to look away from her. "It's most good of you!" He tried, stutteringly, to give her his gratitude. It was not until he stood face to face with her that he realized how slight was his right to ask her! And her easy acceptance of the situation made him feel terribly in her debt. Mrs.

Singleton's praise of her put the finishing touch to all that placed him against her credit. He had forgotten, incomprehensively, to tell his mother. His explanation faltered with delayed meanings. "Mrs. Capgrave offered to come." He looked from one to the other.

Annie Capgrave smiled, and turned from him to find the invalid's two points of fire upon her. It was to the invalid she spoke. "I begged him to use me, if I could be of any use. It's a charity. . . . I've been lost since my husband. . . ." She could carry it no further.

And the words she could not say were as a key in the lock of Mrs. Host's heart. The resentment, the choked rebellion against this new intrusion of Mrs. Capgrave's ministrations lay still, and died. That loss could drive one woman to serve another sufficed.

Annie Capgrave was repeating to herself, "She hates me! She hates me!" All that was rebuked in her sprang to reaction in her feeling for Stephen—this woman's son. Did she not know how he flogged himself to serve his mother's wish—out of love! Love made everything worth while. A line out of the little second-hand book of poetry came into her head "You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat. So I did sit and eat." How frail the poor form was on the bed, that had been brought into the sitting-room, Mrs. Singleton told her, because Mrs. Host could not sleep, and she liked to watch the daylight come down upon the garden. "She must know," Mrs.

Singleton added, "they always want a change before death." It glared upon her, in a moment of fright, that if his mother died, Stephen might go away from Lenne. Oh, he must not go! He must not! The desire to keep him welled into a passion . . . but, of course, she tried to pull herself out with the long arm of reason; of course I can get another lodger. . . .

Stephen had gone close to his mother, and was standing, without fidgeting. He remembered how she hated him to touch her bedclothes, and Mrs. Host was looking at him. The Indian-red cover of the bed-cover was like a bright plot on which was played all that they wanted to say to each other. His voice had a note in it that Annie Capgrave had never heard . . . It was like the mavis thrush in the pale limy Potiphar trees singing, singing, singing, a spring morning's full argument that winter was past and the new year broken from its womb. The miracle of mother and son came home to her . . . no miracle like that would ever spill upon her. "Oh, Mrs. Host!" she exclaimed, "he's devoted to you. No woman could have a better son. He is writing his book to please you—to please you!"

"To please you! To please you!" It went on echoing and echoing into the cave of Eleanor Host's being.

"She has bucked me up tremendously, Mother, you ought to know!"

Again the points of fire were burning into her. "I've done nothing more than I ought!" Imme-

diately she said it, her conscience brawled that she had done far more than she needed—ever since that first swell of grievous conviction about Harry. And afterwards? And now? She shouted to her mind to be still. . . . But, watching them, on the outskirts of all they meant to each other, the truth settled like a bee in her heart and sucked the truth out of her. She envied the older woman her rights in him—the flesh-of-her-flesh, bone-of-her-bone rights in him, for she, too, loved him. . . . Perhaps Eugene Parlet began it. . . . He was Eugene Parlet warmed and darkened into life; all the stored intimacy of Eugene Parlet shone bright upon him. He was no stranger come to betray her expectation of Harry, but a friend come to save her. The thought of Harry sent a flush all through her. My God, what am I thinking of!

His casual glance caught her with her hand upon her breast. Her expression was haunted. The hall at number 9 came back, his hat on the narrow ledge of table, next the hat-brush that always made him think of a crumb tray. He was urged by a great pity to be kind to her, grateful, to show her that he was aware of her goodness and generosity. But the way she was examining him with those wide grave eyes, stilted and made inadequate every proof he was prepared to offer.

Oh, don't look at me! She almost cried out, I don't want ever to see you again. Her own eyes were vanquished. The firelight cast leaping dragons against the glass door of the cabinet

with the queer old stones in it, and mottled the dark side of the room with restless distortions. Her own shadow was grotesque, menacing. She turned from it as from a threat. "Please," she begged, "Mrs. Host, let me stay . . . use me . . . but I understand! You may not want me . . . If you shut your eyes . . . I'll know!"

It seemed to Stephen Host that right and wrong, justice and injustice, were being extraordinarily weighed. He jerked his head round, full of an odd irritation. His mother's eyes remained fixedly open.

Annie Capgrave shut no door upon the moment. She could think of nothing. Her hands were restless. She wanted to do something—press that poor body against her own, make her gratitude felt, not spoken. And all she did, stupidly, was to put her hand into her gray casement overall and send her forefinger searching the seam. And then she went over quickly to the bed, and looked, not at the open, open eyes, but burningly at Stephen. "I want to . . . Oh, do tell her, I want to help her to get better—stronger. . . ."

He bowed his head and brought his lips close to his mother's ear (as if, she thought, I'm not hearing everything a hundred times louder than it is), "You hear, Mother dear? She's like that . . . she's never happy, I believe, unless she's doing a good turn."

Eleanor Host lay there—at the blessed mercy of the "good turns." She was attracted to this

serious Mrs. Capgrave. She was immensely grateful for all she had done for Stephen—and of course, dear, kind Mrs. Singleton needed relief, but . . . For a long time she could add no definition to that "But!"

After tea Stephen invented a planchette-like game by which his mother could express herself. It gave her an opportunity of greater scope than flicking her eyes, once for yes, and twice for no. The scheme occurred to him when she flicked once in answer to his "is anything troubling you?" and when he asked "mental?" there came another single flicker. The idea was to write the letters of the alphabet large upon a piece of cartridge paper and point to them for her to flick out words. He called her "his class" and praised her spelling!

Annie Capgrave slipped away from them and went out into the late winter evening. The smell of the sea was rounding up the darkness. At the gate she paused, and tried to remember the way she had come in the Hunton bus. The cottage with its pointed dormers showed her two watching windows. Inside there were Stephen and his mother. The dark young man who occupied her back bedroom. From the beginning he had disturbed her. . . . She walked down the road quickly, chased by a sensation that she was walking away from all that was known and familiar. There was a cold, clean wind against which a few stars kindled. The sky was wrapped in sleepy rain like a blanket. The air released her from fears and tremors. She was no girl, but a grown

woman, she told herself, ripe with life's lesson. And her head went up in the darkness. Why shouldn't she love? For love was a sacred thing from which one could not turn in haste. Love was a treasure—love was a wound. . . . The independence that was like a sharp edge upon her character made her defiant. The intolerance she never could muster into her knowledge of Harry maintained its escape, and would not let her bear any false witness against herself. If she had been his mother, as well as Harry's wife, it would not have lessened all she gave to Harry. It would not have touched the fringe of her loyalty. And she was almost, came her afterthought, old enough to be his mother. Her love, she protested, was apart from relationship. It was *hers* to give! And yet again it was not hers; she was but the medium through which it poured —a gift drenching all grief. She had not striven to create it. She had neither prayed nor planned for it. Indeed, if she had known she would have turned her face away from the anointment for, before she knew it, she would rather have died of grief for Harry than live for love of any other man. It had been lying there, molded in the leaf-soil winter, springing now—like those darts in her window-boxes, hidden and invisible, coming into consciousness with pulsing claims. . . . Ah well, why shouldn't she? The houses had ceased. She reached a cross of roads that lay strange in the darkness. If only the moon had been out and not hidden, she would have been able to see

the crested Risings . . . the smell of sweet yarrow . . . her father lying on the sheep-cropped grass with a red handkerchief on his face . . . a lark trapezing the air with note upon note of hopeful wonder that fell like seeds into her fallow youth, shooting dreams that made her listless and miserable for days. Life is never a prototype of desire. Ecstasy can mount only like the lark's song into boundless space; the lark must build upon the ground, keep humble—or lose the secret . . . down below there, the everlasting sea came and went, a tidal traveler upon the face of the world.

She was too wise to stifle this rising tide. It would come in, she knew. Oh, it would come in! And go out! She would be left as a derelict. She knew as well as if every step she were taking was spelling out the judgment that Stephen Host had taken no more thought for her than he had taken —for Mrs. Singleton. He was curiously unawakened. It seemed to be a tradition amongst women that young men sowed their wild oats. She would stake her life on Stephen Host's virginity—it was his mother!

But even if he hated her, her love would remain.

She passed an inn with a creaky sign-board swinging in the wind, a lone cottage in which a woman crooned—a woman with a baby perhaps! She was afraid of babies. She always believed that, if ever she had had a baby, she would not have loved the morsel until it had reached an age

to say how-do-you-do to her! You could never, she felt certain, love a puking, mauling child, as you loved a downy bird out of the shell, or a shaky-legged lamb like the fleecy mite she had rescued from the Potiphar mill-race. But the young had to come, she reasoned; they had to be conceived and borne. And human love was so incomprehensible, so fathomless, leaping from God alone knew where to spread its flames and waters. She wasn't meant to be a mother. She was too tidy!

She came into a place where the trees locked the darkness and latticed it through dim bare branches. The wind was muted, and her footsteps were as footsteps going up the aisle of Saint Dukas'; walking upon brass fardingaled ladies and ruffled men who carried swords to prove that they were men beneath their ruffles. She wondered what they thought of the living walking overhead in a pageant, of those who kept their bright passion for prayer and a belief in God alive and warm. Even if God were a myth, the love and faith that humanity had burned from living hearts was enough to create Him and give Him a body and a character of mercy and kindness empowered to make right prevail. Evil men were those who turned their faces away from loveliness. Not because they could not see it—for what made them leave such large sums to picture-galleries and libraries but the truth they had shut up like a prisoner in their conscience and were compelled to release at death. A silk hat and a

banking account would warp the soul of any man. For to love these symbols was to despise humility. She had often told herself that she would rather have a gardener for a father than a seeds-merchant like Mr. Samson who read the Lessons from the lovely gold-ribboned Bible on the outspread eagle as if he were reading bye-laws to a lot of tourists—trespassers will be prosecuted, instead of the loving-kindness of Christ. . . .

Out again in the open the scudding clouds racked her peace. You could not be happy. You could not be happy. She had never been happy—enough. Grief was different; you could drink your fill of that and always find that there was more. That was why—she stopped to take in the initiation—we were meant to love. She would be a fool . . . it would be time enough when he went away from her. Until then . . . !

She came into the house again with this new liberation of motives upon her. She took no reckoning of Stephen at all. He was there—he let her in—but this, this that had happened, had happened to her. He had been cast like a reflection into her being, and even if he looked into her depths it would not be she that he would see, but his own magnified image. The house was warm and quick as his manner.

"My mother is tired out." She was looking at him as though he had announced some exceptional delight to her. "You've enjoyed your walk?"

She laughed, silently with her lips and eyes,

and did not answer his question. "Poor thing! I hope she is going to have a good night. It must be a relief to her to have been able to let you know what was on her mind."

"Yes," he said dubiously. "Do you know what it was?"

"I'm no good at guessing." She imagined that people in Mrs. Host's straits would always be troubled about deeds in boxes—like poor Miss Hermione.

"The book."

"No." Her voice was an incredulous plea.

"Yes." She spelt out, 'You're not to write it!' I protested that I wanted to, and she spelt, 'No! Only for me.' I had to argue."

"It's what I said."

"Perhaps! But I've convinced her. Of course, I'll go on."

They were standing in the kitchen, and she was taking off her things. He means that *now,* she thought. After all it can't ruin him—he knows such a lot. Aloud, she said, "She will rest easier in her grave."

"Oh, I hope she isn't going to die yet. She's getting over this attack—she has had so many."

"She may have the strongest heart in the world, as your doctor says, but she can't hold out forever." It was wrong of him to keep blind—not to know. It might alter all his resolutions.

"If—if anything should happen to her," he said with quiet earnestness, "I should feel all the more bound to go on."

"Oh!" She drew a great breath of relief. "I'll help you!"

He laughed, and put his hand out to take a stick of celery from the glass dish on the tray that Mrs. Singleton had prepared for the supper. He bit into it crisply. "I know that."

He seemed to be laughing about it as if the fact were good. His gladness gave her joy when she turned it over in her thoughts, when she went to bed. She could not sleep. Stephen was sitting up with his mother until four o'clock when she was going to relieve him. She could not sleep because her thoughts about him, that she could not quench, burned her mind into a white flame. She went over everything concerning him from the first day she met him; not consecutively, but remembering foolish things like the breadth of the stripe on his colored shirts, the way he left his prune-stones in a row on the rim of his plate, his face against the lamp-circle, his quick hands upon the books. Her face blanched and the blood rushed back again as she remembered moving Harry's books. She tried not to think of Harry, but he persisted like a ghost, smiling omnipotently as if he were a wan partner in some trick upon her. She shoved him away completely, cheating herself that Stephen cared . . . pretending . . . but Harry came back, smiling as if the trick were more profound than ever. She left the warm bed and pushed open the window. The frosty chill slapped her like a penance. She was glad to feel it, to feel anything physical that

distracted her from the combat of love in her mind. The moon shone clear now, a gong-like disc upon a carpet of space. The soft white balls of the clouds rolled up against it, and passed, drawing nothing from the moon but the silvery rays that turned them into spun metal and sent them spinning upon their windy journey. The village of Rising Slepe lay silvered in the hollow, pointed roofs and chimneys tall as stairs rose into the cold, cold air. The churchyard yews were like some dark hoarded passion guarding the dead as if the dead were proof that the living ought to live. She lifted her face up so that her wrought soul might the more easily say yea to all that was meant to be. The hills gave her no answer. The night was silent. Downstairs the man she so strangely loved was keeping vigil upon his dying mother. She was keeping vigil too—upon the undying miracle of woman's love for man. No requisite response would ever come from him. He would never know. She seemed destined to those secrecies.

His voice was like a sword upon the ramparts. "Mrs. Capgrave!" She leapt to answer it, forgetting that her feet were bare and that she was in her nightdress. "Yes, yes!" She stood, catching her breath, her hand holding the open door.

"My mother . . . she looks so funny . . . will you come?" He did not wait for her; he turned and went straight downstairs.

His urgency swept her thoughts from herself. She followed him obediently.

Together they bent over the invalid. "Her eyes," he whispered huskily, "they seemed to turn up . . . her mouth . . . look! It's still twitching!" She darted across the room to the cabinet on top of which stood the row of medicine bottles and the brandy that was always in readiness. He had already given her some, he explained, but she insisted upon giving her more and forced the teaspoon through the poor twitching lips. She slipped her hand in to the body that was almost too chill to warm the sluggish stream that flowed in it, and began to massage Mrs. Host's heart. "Help me to lift her up a little, just a little."

Stephen put his hand under his mother's shoulders immediately, and his hand ran straight into the warm softness of Mrs. Capgrave's breast. . . .

"Now," she cried, and commanded his obedience. She leaned forward, feeling his hand there. She bowed her head, willing herself to do no such foolish thing . . . her fingers went on again, gently rubbing the gasping, choking heart.

When her loose hair fell forward he marveled suddenly that he had never before noticed its wonder—its dark wonder, its loveliness—such masses she had! Her face, curtained in its shadow, was grave and spent, as if his mother's strain were hers. When she raised the white, religious lids of her dreamy eyes, he seemed to look down into her soul. She became new, strange, transfused with mystery made intimate. He could understand a man's loving her like mad.

. . . Anthony and Cleopatra . . . she was the sort who could do what she liked with a man. . . .

And just as if the alchemy of the moment made her forget time and space and her own age and his, she was moved to use her power. She hardly knew what she was doing—smiling at him with parted lips, across his mother. "Stephen! Stephen!" she whispered, and her lips gave the word wild sanctions. "She's better, she's better!" What on earth was she saying?

It was as if the swooning woman's consciousness came to her rescue, for at that moment Mrs. Host opened her eyes.

She looked at Mrs. Capgrave, then, slowly, at her son. Stephen met her glance on the instant, and withdrew his hand. She scarcely felt his hand. She was absorbed in his face—in what she saw there. Into the dazed sphere of her mind came a pang, as of a dread fulfilled. It faded, leaving her swinging between two faces—a strange woman's and her son's.

CHAPTER V

THE next morning the rain had come, beading the bare hedges, washing the hard roads. Annie Capgrave was going home! In the long hours after she had sent Stephen to bed, sanity had come to her, and a reawakened fidelity to Harry that was as a hair-shirt upon her spirit. She had had her moment—and for initiation one moment is everlasting. She had never tried to keep Harry. She had never needed, perhaps, to try! She took what he gave her, feeling that to incite more than that ample measure would have been nothing short of tyranny. But now she knew that, if she tried, she could win Stephen Host. The revelation made her—humble. It lowered all the pennons of her processional defiance. Thought after thought, marching out her right to love, reached the end of the journey, or dipped with fatigue. When it came to taking, she was always a Lazarus.

She stood out against all persuasion to remain. Mrs. Singleton failed, silenced by her incontrovertible, "I've a week's washing!" Stephen was found to fail because he never had a chance. He was the root cause of her going. He dangled his mother like a bait. "I'm not deserting her," she protested vehemently; "she has you!"

"I'll be going first thing Monday morning!"

"If she needs me . . . if she isn't really better . . . of course I'll come then." And no sooner had she said it than she realized that the reason she had given was stamped all over with his absence as the terms of her return.

He did not see beyond the surface of her excuses. And all he thought was that she had a pernicious idea about the importance of her week's washing. He insisted upon going all the way to Hunton station with her and taking charge of her suit-case. She did her best to dissuade him, keeping deliberately casual, for to let her desire show in full earnestness would have meant to have broken her full reserve. She was all antagonism this morning—pushing him away like a temptation. She didn't want him! She didn't want him! It was quite enough agony to have encompassed this wild extravagant love for him. Surely God would leave it there! At Number 9 she would shut the door and give it battle. It would mean writing to him to tell him that she couldn't have him back—but there would be a wretched week's notice! She couldn't stand anything that would not be final and immediate. The rainy countryside was beautiful. She loved it. The dark and light of valley and hillrise, of grasslands, and plowed fields somber with waiting passion; roads running like arteries, low-flying birds, the air—gray and misty as the veil upon a bride. It made her heart sore to behold the everlasting fertility of earth on which mankind

was born, and died. Her father had seen such a sky, her mother . . . Harry had seen all the skies in the world! And they were all lying fast in these secrecies, silent, knowing all. It convinced her of divine omnipotence. A cluster of half-blown primroses under an unfurled hart's-tongue made her pause. She had to pick them. Afterwards, she would say to herself—"These I gathered with him."

He did not help her. "You'll miss your bus and have half an hour to wait!"

"Nonsense! I won't be a minute." She plucked them quickly, shaking the pearled rain off the petals over her bare hands. She meant to put on her gloves in the bus.

The shyness he caught in her eyes as she put the pale, wet things against her mouth stirred him into an excessive tenderness towards her. There was something childish about her, pathetic—appealing. She had turned up the collar of the plain black belted-coat of her costume and fastened the revers over with a glass-headed pin. The black austerity against her throat and chin accentuated her pallor. The pallor was extraordinarily clear, and for the first time he remarked what a good skin she had. When he came to think of it, it was rather an adventure being out with her, instead of seeing her across the table with a tray or duster in her hands. "I say," he exclaimed, and looked fixedly at her trim black brogues—so neat and sensible, like herself—"I say, it's rather jolly being out with you!"

"Rather jolly!" she repeated, and looked as if he had vexed her. She walked again beside him.

The dark line that began at her chin, rounded over her bosom. The primroses burned their candle-flames against it. Last night . . . his hand had felt that softness! The queer thrill, stolen from his sharp anxiety about his mother, returned. She became a different Mrs. Capgrave . . . her feet stirring the edge of her white night-dress, pink with cold, pressing quickly into the hepatican-shaped leaves of the carpet . . . she was like some picture . . . some woman in a vision . . . some Christian errand-of-mercy woman —warm, fleet, rapt! There was always something rapt about her. The slightest thing you said to her was like tearing her back from—a curtain. And over all was her lavish, generous kindness that drenched him with debt to her as with rain. The rain was falling quite heavily now. Instinctively they hastened. And just before they reached the corner by the Friends' Meeting-house they heard the bus whistle. "Jove! it's off!" They hurried round the corner and were only in time to see the gay yellow monster take the bend that led downwards to the cliffs. "They run every half-hour."

She had a feeling then that fate was against her. The Spanish yews by the little chapel were so clearly dark, so motionless, so silent. The rain polished their leaves. They were burnished as the bright blades of sentinels—ready to witness and bear testimony. She shut her eyes, and they

were painted into her blindness with their dark green wetness, pyramid-formed against the white chapel wall. "What a pity!" she said slowly. The problem of how to spend another thirty minutes with him was vexing her. She was pushing, pushing against his presence all the time, not daring to delight in him. "You're to go home," she said with as much emphasis as she could command.

The suggestion that he should leave her in the middle of the rainy road struck him as utterly absurd. He took his cigarette out of his mouth and laughed frankly. He dissolved into a new, teasing faculty towards her. "You can't order me home like that! This isn't Number 9!"

The quality of his laughter, although it did not give him the whip over her wishes, left her at his mercy. It made her search him—take joy in him. He was young. Beautiful with youth . . . everything was before him. She had a maddening desire to run away from him, take to her heels and run, fleet as she used to run, down the wet, shiny road—but she was rooted, motionless, as the yews. Why didn't he go? "We can't stay here, in this rain," she said, stupidly stubborn. "You'll get wet to the bone!"

"And what about you?" Her self-forgetfulness roused his protection. He pointed to the meeting-house. "If it's open, we'll shelter."

Premonition tormented her—the sort of weight that used to be upon her when Harry missed his train. She followed him up the short graveled path. The door opened when he turned

the handle; he nearly fell over a pail of water. Somebody had been scrubbing the floor. The soapy-water smell made the place homely for her. The queer little leaded panes in the high sunken windows reminded her of the Potiphar gate-lodge —the seats in rows! "It's like a schoolroom!" she exclaimed.

"Exactly," he assented. "Queer folk, Quakers. . . ."

She imagined the silence in which they waited to be moved by the Spirit, kneeling . . . pink roses in some girl's hat . . . the echoes of a man's prayerful voice breaking against their ears . . . somebody who had just shut the Bible and who had been telling them perhaps of Paul in the Thesalonican synagogue alleging to the Jews that it behoved the Christ to suffer. . . . She felt like putting her lips against something when she heard that! Load life as you would, hide it, bind it, the suffering was there—the corpse of one's self on which you spilled the warmth of being. God knew! How they could sit listening to words so fraught with meaning and image without breaking into revelations defeated her belief. She herself would be stormed by the silence, driven from all her wits, into confession, into open prayer for preservation—not from what might happen, but from the way she might meet it. The thoughts of these things forced her mind to cry out to the Lord to make her strong! She was staring up to the bare table beyond the seats as though it were a spy-hole into Eternity. Oh, she moaned under

her breath. Her hands were restless; the primroses shook their last drops like tears.

And all at once he was poignantly conscious of her dread and fear of solitude at Number 9. It was unbearable to think of her there with the ghost of her dead husband. To let her go was—a sort of betrayal. She had been so decent. "Look here," he exclaimed, with alien firmness in his voice, "I'm not going to let you go. You hate it."

"Hate it?" she repeated. Slowly she smiled, and all the wisdom of the world seemed writ upon her face.

"You know you do!" His voice was transfused with pleading. "Don't go!"

His insufferable tenderness forced her. "What does it matter to you?" she asked with swift bitterness.

She had put her closed fist up against her cheek and was pressing it there as if it clenched her misery. Her dark hair was wet, curled upon her ear. Her head was half bowed, and from the brim of her common black felt hat the rain dripped. Her woe—her need, besieged him. Like lightning his life curled and fused upon hers . . . his mother, his work, his book snapped into their places. . . . "Mrs. Capgrave . . . why can't we get married . . . and share things!"

Waters broke over her heart. It was her question. She ought not to have asked. She had forced him. My dear young man, she wanted to say, you don't know what you are saying. But

what she did say, passively, was, "Don't pity me!" Love was storming against her spirit like a ransoming host, smiting her strength to the ground. His declaration—here she had him in her hands, and she could not take him. She had to let him go! This was infinitely worse than any notice she might ever have been compelled to give him.

"It isn't—pity," he said earnestly, and could think of nothing but pity for her, although this new feeling that had come upon him completed all that he had ever felt for his mother—and that, surely, was love. She fulfilled, too, miraculously, for him all his mother's failures—made his life whole, healthy. He wanted her. That sufficed. He imagined life going to pieces again. . . .

At the first touch of his hands upon her arms she surrendered. Argument left her. Wisdom left her with nothing but humility. Hardly knowing, she drove him into choice between the denial she dreaded and the stamp of certainty upon his declaration. "You don't care . . . !"

"I do," he answered simply, looking straight into her eyes. "Do you?"

"Ah!" She bloomed out then with all she felt for him. "My dear, I wanted to serve you from the beginning. It was . . ."—she laughed lowly, huskily—"it was Eugene Parlet's fault!"

"Eugene Parlet!"

"Yes, the Norman!"

"The Norman!" Clear as a bell he heard Isabel Beggary's "I'm on the side of the Normans!"

"Ah!" she had upset him. He looked quite jealous. It gave her greater proof than speech. "He's only a brass man in Saint Dukas'." She was wholly unprepared for the fierce way he pulled her into his arms and kissed her. His kiss was softer than Harry's. She could not bear to see the dark, dreamy hunger in his eyes. "Oh, my own! My own!" she murmured gently, and drew him closer. In the white peace of that place it seemed to her that she was close to God. Life was no longer fallow, astray with every wind, but steadied as a sown field, with the pattern of its duty clear upon it. She felt blessed, yet troubled. Ease had not yet settled upon her. It was too soon. She would get used to knowing the joy that had come to her. The wonder was nearly heart-breaking . . . shyly she looked at him. "I want . . . you mustn't mind . . . I want to say a prayer!" She knelt down by the back of one of the rush-bottomed chairs and bowed her face over a hand that still clutched her primroses.

He never forgot her as he saw her then—black against the whiteness, flame-flecked by the primroses, bowed in prayer that shut her completely into her own sphere—made her mystical in a lamp-lit world where he had no more place than an owl for all his knowledge. He envied her! To be simple and credulous was to be passionate as a child amidst all the streams, to see stars when it thundered—to come out at the end with laughter in the heart. It made her dear to him, intensified her goodness, her strength that would never

fail him. And with that unfailingness to support him, how could he ever fail! It was just the sort of marriage his mother had always wanted for him. "Somebody steadier than yourself!" He preened himself with the success. "My mother will be pleased."

She was not so sure. Behind Mrs. Host's silence she had been aware of perceptions, vague stirrings of the truth. It was the way, perhaps, that she had taken the photograph of the child Stephen into her hands; when she looked round Mrs. Host was watching her with those electric eyes. "Oh, I don't know," she protested. And the weight that had flown returned again upon her will. Somehow she, who was never secret, wanted nobody to know. She was afraid that the spell would break, that at the slightest contact her dream would crash and shatter. "Don't tell her yet!" she begged.

He considered, with eyes away from her, tormenting her because they could forget her. "Perhaps you're right," he agreed. "Not until she gets back her speech!"

She was bound to be honest now. "She may never speak again!" How blind he was about his mother. "Don't you see?" she urged, angered by her own quick subtlety. "It makes it easier for me to nurse her!" And as soon as she said it the idea that her durance in his acknowledged love depended upon a flutter of his mother's eyelids reached out to her with fright which nothing but the uttermost certainty could assuage. She

took his arm—her breast was full of birds on wing—"Oh, Stephen! If we are going to be married to each other, let's do it soon!"

Her urgency alarmed him, shortened his impulses with a phrase—he ought to think of what he was doing! Just as her forlorn sadness had drawn him, her haste to make decisive plans withdrew him again. His life was still his own to settle and arrange. "Of course we are going to marry each other, but we needn't be in such a hurry."

She was standing suddenly in the shallows, out of the flood of happiness, listening, listening—as one listens to a receding sea. There was hardly a sound. The window above Stephen's head showed a latticed patch of yew against the misty air. Years and years went like waves back to her own youth. It was so long ago . . . she was too old . . . it was better to be brave now. She had let go his arm and was watching the yew-green shadow. "The fact is," she began, and he knew from her habit of using the phrase as a prefix that she was going to say something very sensible. "I am too old. . . . I was forty last year, and I expect that's nearly old enough to be your mother!" She had put it as bare as she could. . . . She thought the raindrops would never fall from the eave-shaped window-frame . . . his words never came.

It may be that love was fooling him, but it seemed to him that there was an ardent beauty in the face she held away from him; its serious-

ness was tinged with a queer holy patience that made her beloved. For the first time he used her name. "Annie—what has age got to do with it?" Indeed, he loved her in that moment as all men love their first woman.

And when she looked at him she was content. Power came back to her instead of weakness—the power to give. She did not feel old—only older because she had known sorrow.

Out in the gray-wet road again she felt exhilarated, ready for laughter. She wanted to take his hand and cry out, "Let's run for the bus!" And all she could do was to marvel that it should still be raining and the sun still hidden. If she had found summer ripe upon the fields, she would have taken it as the most natural sign and seal upon the miracle of her happiness. The ripeness was all within her.

He did not go straight home when he left her. She would not let him go with her to the railway-station after all. An impulse made him turn into Fairey Woods and take the bridle-path that led to the Risings summits. Sounds dropped low in the heavy air. The flight of magpies swished like waters through the crests of the conifers; his feet, amidst the dead leaves, waded into echoes that made his steps as the steps of several men marching through the undergrowth. Everything seemed alive, solitary, secret in the center of difference. If he cried out into this throbbing existence, other creatures would cry out as well, but none would answer. He was separate. His mind brooded in

the separateness, taking gleams as though his thoughts were lenses—larch and pine, spire on spire, the old and the young green upon them; here and there a vista of distance, brown or wet-green as the field showed, a plow threading its furrow, a cluster of fleecy ewes ready for lambing; and always the rain-cloud sky hanging like a vast gray hammock over everything. Supposing it collapsed one day, and God fell out of it like Neptune! What a joke that would be for the rationalists! Annie . . . would be concerned about the mending . . . Martha . . .what was prayer but a species of pulley on which you worked the ropes of spiritual aspiration! Women—the Annie Capgrave sort—were driven upon prayer. What did it matter, when all was said and done, the Golden Fleece or God Almighty, so long as the power was furnished to make men do—and dream! Anything that kept the spinning-wheel going in the soul. . . . He felt extraordinarily calm, rendered from this new contact with Annie Capgrave—no longer landlady, but a beloved woman—into a clarity that solved all his restlessness. It was her simplicity, her depths to which you could see as through crystal. It was amazing when he came to think of it! How he could have gone on living all those weeks in the same house with her and never have foreseen . . . never have seen her before. For that was what it amounted to. He never really saw her until last night—across his mother. And the odd thing was, that he should feel freed, liberated. He had got hold

of the reins. . . . She would never tie him. Marriage with her was the very thing for him. It —it supported him. He seemed to have been slipping into the relationship with her unconsciously, for now that it was declared between them, he felt no transport of excitement, only settled as if something that had been troubling him was wiped away. No, there was no excitement beyond this sudden, earnest desire to possess her, take care of her. She needed somebody. It would have been downright cruelty to let her go on, alone, in Fleetway Street. He knew quite well what he was doing. She thought he didn't—leaning out of the bus to ask him that absurd question: "If he changed his mind when he got home, would he write to tell her before Monday?" What a fool he would be! He ought to have married earlier on account of his mother. But it hadn't seemed fair to ask a girl. . . . He had kept—all that sort of thing in its place. He had never thought of love, as Davoren thought of it, as an æsthetic necessity. The only women he knew intimately were, those of the flesh, his mother and Mrs. Singleton; and those of the mind, whom he hated for the wreck they brought upon men—Menelaus, Sordello, Jason, Henry the Eighth, Sisera . . . he could go on piling up the names of the victims, and see the smiling, beautiful feminine faces leaning out of the windows of the wrecked paradises they had lost for men. The beauty of women! He prided himself he had never wandered in that maze, beguiled or other-

wise. He had seen Davoren, white as a wraith with frustration when that fair girl, he had forgotten her name . . . Daphne . . . Chloe . . . had gone off with her sculptor. And when he told Davoren that no girl would ever play the fool upon him like that, Davoren had said with withering scorn, "Lord Almighty! I pity you!" He laughed, even now. Job on the dunghill wringing his hands because his friends hadn't got the scabies! And then a sort of warm peaceful gladness stole over him, and he remembered Annie . . . her form in his arms, the queer crêpy smell of her hat-ribbon, the intensity of her lips —her hand crushing the primroses into his sleeve. Her childish incredulity made him want to—to forgive her for something. Of course he loved her! When he thought of her from the beginning, he could see that it was meant to be. She ought to have come sooner because of his mother.

He watched the triangular zigzag line of Rising Slepe as he came out on the lower hill, over the western valley, upon a reniform space of green that had once been cropped by the castle deer—feudal deer . . . when sport had the beauty of old pictures . . . men and women who could neither read nor write, but whose eyes were filled with riches . . . starved minds and hurt bodies —souls sleek and over-fed with loveliness. Today a man's mind was a box of tricks turned out of the board schools. Certainly Annie Capgrave made one feel that the soul had its values. But she would never make him religious—in the sense

of the Psalmist. Goodness! Ah, to spread goodness, peace, utter contentment—that was worth all the creeds!

He was level with the tree-tops. The sky was riding by, quickened by wind that was clearing the mists. He felt exalted, stirred into that moment of expansion that comes to youth with the first fingers of maturity—when one takes on responsibility. Living filled up, glory-colored into his hands.

The mood did not keep the flight of that moment. But it took the whole day to die, to sink into establishment.

Sitting with his mother in the dusk, he lost the vestiges of triumph. Security gave place to insecurity, to uncertainty. Perhaps the act of pretense that he was practicing upon her, with the open book to which he gave nothing but blindness, smeared him with unreality. He felt neither happy nor unhappy, like an invalid recovered to the pitch of being neither well nor ill—on the verge of two worlds, waking no responses. Twilight was filming the atmosphere beyond the window-pane. Firelight was coming in, full feathered, into its season. The old room was at ease in its worn comforts, shining around his mother's presence. His entire life bore this pattern. . . . And then, he could not stem his sudden insurgency. She *was* his mother! The fact always acted as an anæsthetic when he was with her. But now, in this awful unviolated silence of hers, her presence had half the quality of absence. Da-

voren . . . he couldn't get Davoren out of his head! Davoren was his antithesis. *He* had never turned his face away from any adventure—one of those who marched breast-forward. . . . Davoren said he was a born immigrant. What was it? The Hegira mark on his forehead . . . only his mother! Only his mother! And here she was, almost insensible! Davoren's sarcastic "Buy her a bath-chair and then go forth, my son, out of the Damascus Gate—and write regularly." The blue of Eastern nights, the lovely bright complex masses of the bazaars, the smells—ordorous, or spicy-sweet as the hair of the world—the desert he was once, at least, to cross, strange seas . . . all closed up into the quadrangle at the Bede House—Merrion and young Bageshot poking Foley's marbles down the drain. His life *now* was going to be railed into these discoveries, trivialities, deceits. Against his stare, the window split like gauze upon Annie Capgrave's face! He was startled, accepting her for a moment as a vision, she had come so suddenly. And, as she moved, sharp on the heels of relief came comprehension of her terrible and affrighting sadness. He went out to open the door to her with instant sympathy. "Annie! What is the matter?"

She put her finger upon her lips. "You haven't told your mother?"

"No." He drew her in.

She pressed her fingers upon his arm and raised her searching eyes. "Where is Mrs. Singleton?"

"She'll be back any time now, she . . ."

She didn't allow him to finish. She passed down the hall, beckoning to him to follow, and opened the door of the little breakfast-room that used to be his father's study. Following her, he was aware that she was in trouble. He was unprepared for her clutch upon him, before he closed the door, and to find her clinging to him like a distraught, hunted child. "Oh, Stephen! I had to come!" she cried out, as if she were doing something wholly outside the canons of rational behavior.

"Why of course!" he said quietly, tenderly, putting his arms about her. "I am very glad."

His gentle sense of guardianship steadied her. She moved away from him, firmly resenting his hold, and went to the other side of the table, close against the window. Her face was like a cameo against her dark clothes, against the dusk. The room was cold. And then her voice set the coldness and the descending gloom astir. It was pitched low to preserve his mother. But its lowness could not conceal its passion. The tones went up and down like clear flames, tongue-shaped and exact upon a fineness that had been spun from great secret pain. Not one night of suffering, but many, it had taken to weave this sad music out of human lips. Her drawl was rounded, husky; her queer little habits of speech were harmonized in the process . . . she was like a woman speaking on a stage—rousing pity with no other weapon than the way she spoke. The significance of what she said was magnified—made into mere

quantity upon the quality that told you everything.

"You think I'm a great child!"

He offered no denial. "What is it, Annie?"

"It's . . . it's everything!"

He saw her hands moving shadowily.

"It would be hard for you to understand. Nobody can understand what another is suffering. It's like pain—it belongs only to one." She was hesitating, stammering, not as one stammers before a confessional, but as before a revelation. "I haven't told you about Harry . . . there hasn't been time. You ought to know. I've . . . I've loved him since I was sixteen. . . ." She broke off, despairing of words that would ever prove her right to his mercy.

Her bearing, all that was beating those wild, low tones out of her, dropped into the silence, behind an arras. He could not see. The echo of her voice was a rhythm in his ears. "But . . . what is it now?"

"Ah!" Her hands, her lips, her eyes, charged him to comprehend. "You!"

Pity and love rose flood-deep within him. He put out his arms. "But, Annie . . . !"

"I know! I know!" It was like an elemental moan breaking loose in the dip of some torrent. "Oh, Stephen! I know. I can't help—loving you. But . . . you don't know . . . when you came first I don't think I had allowed myself to believe that he was—never coming back . . . you—you broke all that . . . just as if you used a hammer to smash a window. It

wasn't you . . . you didn't know . . . you couldn't help it! It was just your being in the house . . . in the rooms he used to be in. I tried to live that down. I slaved. I invented things to do—baking at bedtime, all sorts of things. . . . I did the silliest things for you, things you never noticed, like changing your bootlaces. . . . I tried to forget him until forgetting seemed disloyal. Then, at Christmas . . . I longed for you to go home, to leave the house to me—and him. . . ."

The last remnants of light were vanishing. She was almost invisible, her presence made palpable solely by her heart-breaking voice on which the silences were as margins upon the page of some doom.

"It was terrible. . . . I thought you would never come back. . . ."

"Yes, I remember!"

"What do you remember?" she asked with speed that was almost fierce. She was wondering if she had betrayed herself before she herself knew the fecund truth of her love for him.

"No, not then," he corrected. "The next time I was coming away you—you told me a little. I realized . . ." He wanted to comfort her, sustain her, but his words sounded formal in the train of hers. He felt humbled before her, unworthy.

"I didn't know then that I loved you."

The pause became an evocation. Straining through the grayness, their eyes sought to reach

the depths beyond outward communion. "Neither did I!" He smiled into the dimness, and offered the shelter of explanation. "I think we must have been getting to care for each other without knowing!"

Immediately he said that she knew that he was wrong. He hadn't thought about her at all, while she . . . she soaked herself in thoughts of him, actions concerning him—him, him, him! She had generated—all this! It was Harry! Harry was at the root of it all. For one tragic instant she imagined Harry's ghost driving her into this manifestation of love, so that he could watch her riot and take pleasure . . . and then the moment swung back to Harry's rights in her—the rights she had resented when he was warm and living! They were now besieging her into surrender—into the most penal possession. "Oh, my dear!" she cried out, and her own heart could not have told her whether the cry was for him or Stephen. It brought Stephen across to her. She heard him brushing against the round table, fumbling. His arms came round her, unfolding with an evasive comfort. She let herself rest there for the minute before he spoke, and set the arguments scrambling again in her soul.

"My dear," he said, echoing her, "let us accept things!"

"Oh, you don't know . . . you will never know!" How could he ever conceive the tragedy that was tearing her both ways. She struggled to tell him. "When I went back this morning, the house was

like a forsaken thing . . . it was that forlorn—dust over everything, and everything crying out to me as—as if I'd gone astray. I felt—guilty. But I love you! I love you! I love you!" Her voice was deep with proof to give denial to all that he might be guessing about her attitude towards himself. "Be sure of that!" she sighed, and pressed her face nearer to the window-pane, painting her profile against the outside darkness. "I want you like mad . . ." She pulled her words in before they went on to tell him that also "like mad" was her anguished desire to put him out of the life that had been consecrated to Harry. And then his sternness surprised her.

"Look here, Annie! You mustn't give in to all that nonsense! It's living alone. It isn't good for you!"

She laughed shakily—as though he had cheated her. It was impossible to tell him now that she couldn't have him in Harry's house—amongst Harry's things. Standing in the bedroom to-day, she had accepted that conviction for herself—on her knees. Her father's honesty in the luster vase was a—a sort of witness. She could see it still, the dried ringed circles like fairy-money paying out a kind of dried peace upon her torture. "I wish," she said slowly and irrelevantly, "I wish I was another woman!" So few people had come into her life. But those few had seared her with intimacy. . . .

She was a child again. He remembered a little girl at a party, long ago, frills and frills, and a

tight little voice saying with abnormal earnestness, "I wish all the shapes were pink!" "You've got so many things to remind you. . . ." He wanted to reason with her, wear her out of this hysterical submission into a clear vision of causes. He was nonplussed when she said, with that terrible low note in her voice again, "I have!" Her own argument was so deep in its wound that she could offer no shaft against his. In the deepening darkness they were like two disembodied beings at war with each other's love.

And, just for a second, Stephen Host felt helpless. But any resignation of his desire to protect her would have been like leaving her in a forest. He had to rescue her. "There's only one thing to do," he said firmly, and this time she could not struggle out of his embrace, "and that's to get married as quickly as possible. With me on your hands . . ."—he held her closer—"you'll have no time to fret, Annie. . . ."

"Yes."

"I want to help you . . . take care of you."

"Stephen!" She caught her breath upon his name and said no more aloud. But her mind went on telling him that she, too, wanted to help him, take care of him, be with him always no matter what he did—or failed to do . . . to tell him too, that, in his arms she was all obedience . . . as she had been in Harry's. She blamed herself! She called down the most bitter name upon herself . . . it was a sort of weakness—a weakness of being alive! And it was foolish—for he couldn't hold

her in his arms for twenty-four hours a day! "We must get another house!"

"Why, yes!" His will quickened upon this solution of the difficulty. He hadn't thought of that!

His ready assent filled up the full content of her impulsive suggestion. To leave *there* was like breaking faith with Harry forever—breaking some eternal avowal. She couldn't! She couldn't! She stayed motionless, silent, not listening to a word of Stephen's plans. She would marry him. But she couldn't move, she wouldn't move . . . she would get accustomed. . . . The past would be past. The living would be the living . . . once she was married, her will would pull through. Her wits came back, catching a regret of Stephen's. "I think we could!"

"Have a special license!"

"Yes." She nodded her chin into his coat.

He tried to explain—he hadn't a sou . . . his mother's illness.

"I've got enough!" She controlled herself before she told him it was Harry's insurance money. Her mind was too practical to wince against such use of it. And she was too deep-souled to put money on the plane of essentials—for her the agony of the deed had nothing at all to do with base motives.

"It would make it easier."

"Ah, yes!" It would be easier for her when the wrench was over and she was established in new duties. Perhaps they would go away, when

this book was finished, into a place that would be new to her . . . where nothing would remind her—an inland place, far from the sea, a sheltered place where she could harbor daily things—not see beyond. She remembered his morning's hesitation. "But no . . . don't rush into it, Stephen. Take time to think." Her forefinger was working furiously up and down his sleeve. ". . . Only I must go somewhere, until we do. I—I can't sleep in Fleetway Street. . . . I must find a room."

"Stay here. You must stay here." Immediately she held back the weight mounted upon his determination. She was right in the morning. She had a trick of being right . . . and, after all, the sooner it was over the better. He would tell his mother. "We must tell my mother!"

"No, Stephen, no!" She felt like shaking him. "Don't you know how ill she is? Supposing she didn't like me!"

"I am sure she likes you."

"You can't be sure . . . like me as a nurse, yes, perhaps! As—as your wife?" He began to murmur, but she checked him with her landladyish manner. "You're not to, Stephen! You're not!"

"Very well." He gave in reluctantly. "But she must be told!"

She fled from the implication of deceit. "I wish she could be told. . . . I'd rather know . . . but . . .!" Her sensible mind saw all the issues. "She is not well enough for shocks—to be told. I hope—I hope she will be better—soon . . . before . . ."

"Before what?" He was teasing her now, scaring doubt from the seeds of the moment.

"Our marriage." She said it openly, with the directness of a response from the altar. But no sooner had she said it than the full significance frightened her. She shivered and pressed close against him. They were in the dark. Her life seemed to have gone into the dark, to be clutching at securities, shivering, afraid.... Harry's shade was there, taunting the darkness. The Harry she knew was lying out in the silvery waters, washed to the white bone, making a palace for creatures whose consciousness held no vestige of her being. Life was divisible and divisible . . . it was only the soul that sought unity and attained the Kingdom of Heaven. Dear Lord Jesus, she prayed, make the way clear, show me what is Thy will. . . . Stephen's kiss on her praying lips was as a seal upon God's answer.

He made her promise to be brave, be good, to behave herself . . . to think of him!

"I don't need to be told!" His solicitous tenderness brought her near to weeping because of its futility, its failure to solve her riddle. Only she could do that. She was plunged upon her will. And the will is the last weapon in the world to fight with love. But she promised, swearing silently that she would try her best to come out of reality into a fair dream of what life was going to be. And by the time she had exhausted the dream, she comforted herself, perhaps the reality would have blurred its edges into stony tolerance. She

had always lived two lives—everybody did, she supposed—the outward and the inner. But this was not living two lives, but splitting the inward before her peace with God—her peace with herself.

As she helped him to light the lamps Mrs. Singleton had left ready in the kitchen, she tried again to tell him, urged by a sedimental motive that was the antidote of duality. She was calmer now. The wild tumult that had driven her forth from Fleetway Street to seek him had abated in contact with him. But she was not one of those who are born to sophistry; she had no facets. "You see," she said, her eyes lowered upon Mrs. Host's lamp, "as well as this terrible feeling about him, I feel that I shall never be wholly yours. . . ."

"As you were his?"

The question made her mute—swung her between affirmation and denial. Even with Harry she had cried out against barriers. "Perhaps I want too much!" she offered musingly, raising her deep eyes above the lamp-glow. "I want everything to be a—a sort of perfect!"

He sensed something of his own discontent in her. The moment gave him communion. Woman was meant to stem that side of man, lessen the burden—yield desire's full mortal measure. "We're built like that!" he said tamely. "Aren't there compensations?" And "compensation," her mind retorted, was compromise at the end of the journey. His look widened with appeal. He had a feeling of extravagant loneliness with her. The

loneliness sent him backwards and forwards—drew him towards her and withdrew him. . . .

All at once, as she looked at him, she realized that they had talked the matter into weariness. And, almost as if somebody had beaten her body, she felt drained into submission. Defeat so filled the present that the future showed no immediate terror. Day would dawn into the old ordinary repetitions: things to be done, little things that made a play of life's earnestness. She smiled upon him—patience and gentleness and resignation. "Yes," she answered, and made the syllable a pledge.

It was extraordinary the way her smile lightened him, brightened him with reward. He became excitedly encouraged. He felt the happy little thrill that always pervaded his mind when he succeeded with an equation. If she had been one of his boys, he would have slapped her shoulder. Instead, he leaned across the luminant circle. "Well, then, let's hold on to them like grim death!"

He carried the lamp into the sitting-room. His mother's eyes were open. "Mother, here's . . ." —he nearly said Annie—"Mrs. Capgrave. She had to come back, you see!" He turned his smile to Annie.

"I've come back!" She was thankful she had forgotten to take off her coat and hat. Mrs. Host's piercing points of eyes were reading her through. Before them she could offer no subterfuge, no confusion, that could twist the sick

woman's thoughts. If she knows, she knows. Her opposition would only keep the color of difficulty upon the tangle of affairs. She sighed and then was caught in Stephen's smile. The room glowed about her and Time cried out at her, "Be happy! Be happy!" He was standing between them—his mother, who was passing—passing like her own youth—who knew all his secrets, who had watched him change, chrysalis-like; and she, who was to share his ripest years . . . as she had shared Harry's. Very rich, she seemed, in that instant's facing with life. There was no such thing as disloyalty. The gifts were there to be taken. She beamed back at Stephen, her breast kindling with suffusing joy.

Looking from one to the other, he gave up the ghost of hankering ambitions. They both needed him. Their need sufficed to found the stability of his career. He would knuckle down to it like a man. "We shall have to adopt her, Mother," he chaffed. "We need a guardian angel!"

Never, as then, did Eleanor Host desire the power of speech. His voice, his voice, she was calling out to herself. He thinks I don't know. Mrs. Capgrave became the embodiment of all the sense she had desired for him. There was that, at least, to be said! But the embodiment turned upon her as a punishment. A middle-aged woman—not commonplace exactly, she had too much character. But she was no fit mate for Stephen—for the new Stephen—the young aspirant with a warm glory of desire upon him; the Stephen she

had come to see since she was stricken; the Stephen she had frustrated. But youth is resilient. And hope burned her to a belief that he would rebound. A spark would release him, set his trail alight. She could almost see the marks upon him . . . the stigmata. . . . She wished and wished until the wish was anguish, that she had paid more attention to those plays he had written! She had been so anxious to discourage him. Her discouragement had come home to her! She had been a positive tyrant! A long-ago look of boyish strife upon his face came back to her. . . . "But, Mother, I must write! I must!" She had answered dryly with, "Write! But don't write idle nonsense!" That was before Cambridge—the first sprout of the passionate effort within him. He was like a plant that had been kept in the dark. . . .

"I tell you what, Mother! You must get well." The gaiety in his face strung her to apprehension.

"Yes, Mrs. Host, you must!"

She blinked into the two smiling faces.

"She . . ."—he pointed to Mrs. Capgrave—"is going to make you well. Isn't that so?"

And Mrs. Capgrave nodded. Beyond them the faded blue ribbons were tied above the rose-garlands in the French wall-paper. The Euripides bindings showed a serried rank of morocco columns behind the glass of the bookcase. The odd, sweet scent of loose-strife recurred to her in the echo of some long-spent moment when she had, perhaps, raised distraught eyes beyond con-

ciliatory people to catch at these straws—outward and visible signs of her circumstance.

A door shut somewhere. Mrs. Capgrave went quickly from the room. Stephen and she were alone. She wanted passionately to speak to him, to make everything clear. He looked at her tenderly, then away—following thoughts that were not hers. Then he too went out of the room.

He caught Annie coming back. "Have you told Mrs. Singleton? We'd better tell her!"

"No! no! no!" The husky whisper was fierce as a threat. She was standing under the gaslight, her face a rosy effulgence that warmed and infused her pallor—made her young.

"Don't you think she'll guess?"

"I don't care! I don't trust her!" She melted into pleading. "Let's tell nobody, Stephen, until it's all over!"

"Then, for God's sake, let it be soon!" he burst out, terrified by a promise of scenes and implications.

"As soon as you can arrange it!" Her slow smile broke open her lips, her eyelids dropped into her trick of shelter from which her eyes shone as reflective pools. To him she was suddenly beautiful, desirable. He wanted to crush her into his arms.

CHAPTER VI

IT was one of those calm, lucent days that drop sometimes into the lion-part of March. The clouds were snow-peaked against a blue that might have been June's. Annie was sitting, with idle hands, at Mrs. Host's window. The sheltered garden was dappled with bright spring colors—daffodils with their green ribbons laced and interlaced along the border, crocuses, forget-me-nots, wallflowers, and, back against the lichened wall, antirrhinums were already budded and tongue-tipped. Through the slightly opened window came the salt scent of the sea. Stephen and she had been married that morning in the vestry of Saint Dukas'! He had gone straight back to his school—they had prearranged it like that. But no prearrangement accounted for the coldness of her good-bye. She was thinking of it now. The choir surplices hanging limp and white from the dark pegs had reminded her of a funeral. They kept coming into her vision until the excitement died out of her responses and the gravity of the occasion mounted upon her spirit. She felt happy, yes, but intermixed with the happiness was a sort of satiation that stripped the happening so that she saw with great clearness the clergyman, the witnesses, Stephen, and the room

that was neither quite room nor chapel, but a mixture of both. There was something furtive in the eyes of the older man who had come merely to bestow his signature. The congratulations that buzzed out upon Stephen and herself made her sorrowful—they spoiled things. She wished they had just been silent and gone away leaving her eyes to meet Stephen's without any obtrusive testimony. They prevented her from looking at him. Out on the granite steps the sun glistened, blessing them, she thought, with its bright beams. Stephen slipped his arm through hers. "Good-bye, Annie —until Saturday. I wish I hadn't to wait for the beastly prize-giving!" It sounded casual, but she knew that the expression on his face would not be casual, and that if she had met him he would have given her a smiling gentleness that said everything. She could not bring herself to look. "Good-bye!" she said, and walked down the steps ahead of him and straight down the street towards the railway-station without turning round once. For all she knew, he might be standing there still watching her. She couldn't explain it. Something had come over her . . . and then, at the station, a boy with a basket of violets had thrust a bunch into her hands and she had bought it and brought it home to his mother. It was there now, in the little silver-mounted vase on the table beside her. The afternoon was dreamy, sunny, full of promise. One felt that the summer was coming. The sap was already in the trees. The chestnut in the backyard at Fleetway Street was

leafy, its candles already threaded with tufts of wax. The oaks beyond the window were still in skeleton, patterning their dark boughs against the brightness. It was very quiet in the room. Mrs. Host's eyes were closed. She looked scarcely alive. But the red eiderdown went up and down ever so gently, up and down. That life should sink into this motion of an inanimate thing struck Annie as a profound signal of the powerlessness of human beings. Pity rose in her for Stephen's mother—lying there with her immortal soul in such a prison. She stood up, smoothed her gray overall, and went softly towards the bed. Mrs. Host's eyes opened instantly. And just as swiftly the idea came to Annie to tell her that she and Stephen were married. An incredible muteness kept back the impulse. She felt as if—as if she were wearing an extra garment. . . .

The dark gray hair had been combed into a peak and plaited into an absurd knot on the very top of Mrs. Host's head. Combined with the deep lines that crossed her forehead and her intensity, it gave her long face the blind, staring, gnomic expression of a Chinese mask. Behind it a living being kept its secret reality. If Annie could have reached behind without torturing the mask, she would have gone down on her knees there and then and told her everything. She put a hand out and quietly stroked a corner of the pillow. The movement was as near to a caress as she dared to come.

Mrs. Host's perceptions missed nothing. She's

in trouble . . . something is troubling her. And instead of resenting any increase in her own sphere that was already as full of perplexity as it could be, she was roused into the warmest sympathy. She tried to will the sympathy out to Mrs. Capgrave. To-day she felt stronger. Her grip on life had grown. As long as her mind retained its clear functioning, she had a lot to be thankful for. The feeling of awfulness had begun to go. She was getting used to this suspension that, although it kept her in their midst, prevented her from lucid intercourse with them. She was like a spider dropped from the thread of its own being . . . lying in her parlor . . . watching flies . . . she chuckled, when she thought of that. It was really funny. Funny little flies. Mrs. Singleton flying about, darting at this and that with a brush or a duster . . . things that would last longer than Mrs. Singleton. . . . Stephen—her victim! Stephen —her victim! Her victim! She thought her mind would never stop repeating it. Mrs. Capgrave's voice was full of mercy.

"Stephen was late for school this morning."

She flicked "yes" with her eyelids. Late for school! It reminded her of him with a satchel on his back. Suddenly Mrs. Capgrave went down on her knees. Her voice was heavy with a burden. But whatever the burden was she did not reveal it. All that, Eleanor Host was aware, isn't for me!

"Oh, Mrs. Host, I wish you weren't ill . . . like this!"

The silence went like fingers between them, drawing them, drawing them near to one another —but never close enough. A spectral wind sailed through the open panel of window and blew the Madras curtain out like a balloon. The scent of the violets was almost like a third person in the room.

"If I could change places with you, I would!" Husky warm the voice was, sweet with brave feeling and ready sacrifice. People never want to change, the older woman dumbly averred, unless they get the best of the bargain. Fancy my plight being the better bargain for anybody! But the years—on the other side of the plight, she reasoned, contained much, her motherhood, Stephen! Mrs. Capgrave had nobody. She was a childless widow.

"I would like to give you my strength." She meant it, for at that moment Stephen fell away from her possession before the woman who was his mother, and all she could think of was how her energy tormented her when it came to a matter of spending it to the full limit of exhaustion and forgetfulness of Harry's eternal absence. Then Stephen came back, and her common sense added silently, "Enough to make you well enough to understand and forgive us!" Deceit was like a mortal sin upon her conscience.

"Sacrifice, sacrifice," Mrs. Host was repeating. Why? Oh, she must be very wretched indeed. She tried to burn her compassion into her look. But Mrs. Capgrave was staring out across the

welter of blue fans on their red background, looking at something that was invisible to her eyes, but shining as an apparition in her mind. And a great sadness fell on her. For, tragic as this was—to be withheld from her version of contact with human beings—soon she was to pass from their consciousness as well—from *their* version of contact. The silence then would be twofold. It made her bless the kindness of this living woman upon her knees, who cared—enough to "change places." Her sincerity was profound. She could tell from other things—the way she lifted her! Not the ready, busy firmness of Mrs. Singleton, but slowly, the firmness hardly showing, as if care was the one and only thing in life. And, when she massaged her . . . she almost brought back feeling. She was the sort from whom miracles sprang. She was quite sure her improvement was due to her.

Annie shut the window, fastened the curtain into the silk cord that held it, and came back. She smiled wistfully and rubbed the palm of her hand on the wooden knob of the bedstead. "You must try to get better. Doctor Roper says you will be able to speak . . . we must keep on rubbing you." She smiled, as one might smile at a child who had measles and wouldn't keep on the blankets. "And you must let us nourish you!" She shook her finger. "Stephen's going to be home for a full fortnight . . . we must make it a wonderful fortnight . . . his class has done awfully well. He told me to tell you." As a matter of strict truth,

he hadn't told her. But she knew that he would like his mother to know, and that his mother would like to know, and she wanted to pile on the encouragement. She had a surging notion that, once Mrs. Host knew, all would be well. She meant to make Stephen happy. She was his wife now; it was her duty. But she wanted everything to be straight-forward and clear between them.

Mrs. Host made that futile, twitching movement with her lips. Annie turned away—she could not bear to see this feeble surface of the struggle—to feel the will battling against the bars. The only assuagement she could think of was the cardboard with the letters. Instinctively she brought it out of the bookcase and asked, "Would you like to?"

For Mrs. Host the moment swelled out, psychic, communicant. She blinked with all the deliberation she could muster. Annie had always fought shy of this contrivance. It was Stephen's. But now . . . it seemed that she was merely doing her duty, what was fit and proper, by carrying out any plan of his. Mrs. Host spelt out, "Tell me," and, to avoid fatigue, Annie added for her, "about Stephen?" To her surprise, the answering eyes remained steady.

But she was right. It was about Stephen that Mrs. Host wanted to talk. And yet, immediately Annie mentioned his name, the desire froze within her. Instinct made her say to herself . . . *she* wants to talk about Stephen. Instead of responding instantly, she guarded the moment and gave it

pause. She's too old for Stephen, she thought resolutely, and would yield to no opening on Annie's part. Stephen's desire, if and when Stephen's desire was upon her, was another matter. That would be Stephen's affair. . . . She turned away from the whole idea. It was queer, but she had been turning away from it persistently ever since that night when she had caught that look in Stephen's face—the night Mrs. Capgrave came back. "About——" Annie asked, smiling patiently, and set the pencil on its slow circuit.

"Yourself," Mrs. Holt spelt out.

"She knows. She knows," Annie said to herself. The opportunity had come to her! But with that odd impotence that seizes a dream in its transmission to action, she felt confession slip from her and evade her purpose. She couldn't! It would have to be Stephen! She was holding the large cardboard sheet with the schoolmaster-alphabet that Stephen had printed so perfectly, limply in her fingers; the pencil with which she had been pointing hung limply too. She looked out of the window. The sunlight was still bright and quiet upon the garden; the oaks still bare. "I can't tell you," she said slowly. And when she turned again the expression that passed like a mist over the poor dumb face arraigned and challenged her. To refuse, to offer "no," was like an aggression. "Oh, it's difficult . . . it isn't that there's nothing to tell. . . ." The alphabet slid down softly upon the eiderdown. She looked at it as if it had not so much interrupted her as chased

everything she had thought of saying out of her head. She stood there, stupidly, polishing the curve of the bed-panel with her freed hand. The ormolu clock chimed three times. "My mother died when I was eleven," she said vaguely, dipping at random. . . . Her father had called her to get up, telling her to dress quickly. When she came downstairs he was on his knees before the fire he had newly lighted. "Come here!" he had said. Standing beside him, she was a head over him. He put his arm round her and pulled her body against his—a thin slip of a thing she was. He told her directly, "Your mother is dead, Annie—she died in her sleep." The words went on over and over again in the dreadful pause. She did not take them in—it was hours before she grasped their full significance. Then something splashed on her hand, and when she looked down at him she saw that his eyes were blinded with tears. "Daddy!" she cried out, and put her arms round him. She never really loved him until then—when they clung to each other—until the kettle boiled over and startled them into separation. As if in answer to Mrs. Host's thought, she said, "I was an only child!"

It explained a great deal, but not everything. There was something in her that had been born with her. Those high cheek-bones that made such a deep setting for her eyes, and the way the flesh was hollowed out again upon the wide, full mouth, molded her face to earnestness from the beginning. She was a dreamy, sullen child, Eleanor

Host imagined, a difficult child. She must have needed a mother.

The Potiphar beeches would be out, starring the wintry blackness of the woods with pale green light . . . the swans would be full of secrecy upon their island. Childhood lapped up upon her—a forgotten sea, stealing, stealing, stealing as the tide steals upon the land. She sank into it drowsily . . . Miss Hermione's hospital days, when she sent the flowers to London . . . stacks of them on the broad scrubbed table—Marshalls and Glorys, rose on rose, pink on pink darkening into the darkest red, the dew running off them like loosened gems . . . she used to bite her fist to keep from bruising them with her face crushed into the loveliness, crushing it, crushing it! Beauty it was . . . she imagined the face of God—like that . . . it made her sore to remember. The tears came into her heart. "I had a lovely childhood!" she said simply. The face that looked at Mrs. Host was reverent, arrested.

Mrs. Host saw her then, differently. The quality of scheming, of which she had been subconsciously accusing her, changed into an inward torture that gave her motives and actions the appearance of calculations. Her sincerity showed its underside. She did not plunder peace out of life, but from it, she admitted, and felt excessively sorry for her with a nature like that. She confessed to a "lovely childhood"! Ah! She remembered most the fine things. Growth would take her along that path, mark its periods by the

points of her victories! She wanted to speak aloud, to say to her, "My dear, you are bound to suffer!" Interest, curiosity, questioning, changed to understanding. She was ordinary, middle-aged, but she had a heart of gold! Quick as a revelation, she realized that she was to be trusted with Stephen. It brought her marvelous ease. She tried to show a smile—from her eyes.

But all that Annie saw was a strain that was nearly a grimace. "She doesn't really want to hear about me," she thought rapidly, "it's making her tired." "I was only nineteen when I married . . . he was a sailor . . . it was all—rather wonderful . . . we were so happy, so happy—you couldn't believe!"

Any person who could have answered her and not paid much attention would have thought she had lived in a fool's paradise. Eleanor Host's faculty of attentiveness had sharpened to a sight that read the soul.

"It's nearly a year ago now since—since he didn't come back!" Even for poor dumb Mrs. Host she could not bring herself to say the word that was the most accurate statement of the truth. She put her hand up and felt the cord round her neck on which she had tied Harry's ring. As if it hurt her, she dropped her hand, and her fingers flew to Stephen's ring that was on her finger. The blood swept up to her face before she could control it. Mrs. Host was blinking as if she wanted something. Mechanically, not thinking of what she was doing, she held up the letters. It

was only when the blinking continued that she realized that she had forgotten the pencil.

"My dear," the message came slowly, "I understand. I have known loss too. You must be brave!"

Brave! Tears were choking her. Understanding from Stephen's mother! It was as if somebody had poured wine out of a chalice at her feet. Oh, she would love him, love him, love him, serve him, make him all that he was meant to be! She would finish what his mother had begun—mistakenly perhaps, but with a perfect intention. She would never force him! That was where his mother went wrong. Whatever was within him would have to choose its own soil. But it was wonderful to know that Mrs. Host did not hate her. It melted her into a suffusing acceptance of things as they were. Easiness came into everything, spilling sunshine. She would not wait. She would tell her. She went round the bed again, preparing. "Oh, Mrs. Host!" she began. . . .

Somebody was knocking at the front door. The electric bell buzzed like a swarm of wasps.

She was disappointed, but relieved afterwards that she had not been able to tell her, for Dr. Roper said something had been exciting her, and she felt terribly guilty. And when she thought of what had occurred between them, she was not so sure of Mrs. Host's readiness to accept her as a daughter-in-law—as Stephen's wife. But she was glad, blessed with gladness, that Mrs. Host liked her. She was content with that. Until then she

had felt nothing but criticism—and resentment. She had an odd conviction that Mrs. Singleton reflected Mrs. Host. And the fact that Mrs. Singleton resented her, although compelled by the situation to admit the rationality of her presence in the house, had made her despair of ever being able to wipe away deception. She felt strong now, in the knowledge that what was to come was inevitable. She was Stephen's wife!

During the remainder of that day and the next and until Stephen's arrival she blossomed in the warmth of Mrs. Host's sympathy. All was going to be well. Her duties, with their new justification, liberated her. It was exciting to go into the village shops that were new to her and to order things for the household that was hourly becoming more familiar. Already she was accustomed to the claw-feet of the table; she knew how the dust lodged in the lion-mouth handles of the desk that had been Stephen's father's. She had handled all the queer things that Stephen had collected in his room, from the pinned butterflies to the oar with the stripe and the name of his college. She had come into his house—to stay. . . .

He was coming by the early afternoon train. He would get into Hunton at a quarter to three and catch the next bus to Rising Slepe. She expected him about four. She had made a cake for the occasion and put out the best tea-cloth with the Irish embroidery. She did it all as quickly as she could, but she could not repress the expectation that glowed within her. It lit her

like a lantern. Watching her, Mrs. Host lost confidence again and grew alarmed for Stephen. "All this is not being done for my pleasure in his coming!" she thought with trepidation. And then ingratitude accused her, and she put the bitterness away from her and rested content because the place was so comfortable and bright with welcome.

It was not until the last moment that the urgent notion came to Annie to go out to meet him. There were things she could not say in Mrs. Host's hearing; things that could not wait to be said. She wanted to ask him to forgive her for leaving him like that on the steps of Saint Dukas'. She couldn't think what came over her. She would tell him that she tried to write to him—but she was never much hand with a pen. Above all, she wanted to tell him that Harry's ghost was laid between them. She was not going to let the dead hurt the living. She was his now. It made no difference to her love for Harry—it was only keeping all the love he had taught her warm and thriving in her heart. . . . She came down the stairs with a sense of conquest. "I'm going out." She stood on the threshold. She nearly said, "to meet Stephen," but the discipline she had put upon her directness controlled her in time, so that she said instead, "Hyndman's haven't sent the sugar! I shan't be long!" It was true that Hyndman's boy had forgotten to bring the sugar, and she meant to call for it as she passed the shop on the way to the bus. But it was also true that there

was no need to go for it, for she did not take sugar, and there were nearly a dozen lumps left in the sugar-basin for Stephen. As she went down the village street she felt as if she had played a trick on Mrs. Host. But, then, she was playing it on herself as well, she argued, and cried quits upon the matter.

There was a gold haze in the air that softened the distance. Beyond the village, where Slepe ended and the valley was ringed, she saw the pine-forest climbing the hill's breast like a band of fugitives in chaos, gaps in the ranks, waving tumult where the wind caught the green plumes. The sky was all an even shore, waterless, shipless, faint-flushed with the sunset. The light turned the walls of the Friends' Meeting-house into dazzling whiteness, cut by the dark yews as by a cavity. She never passed there without remembering—bowing her head with the remembrance, repeating the prayer she had prayed there. If Stephen had contributed his measure to her suffering, he was contributing a fuller measure to its abatement. Dear Stephen, she whispered under her breath, dear Stephen!

The bus arrived without him! She could not understand it. His letter had come only that morning. It was unlikely that he could have altered his mind, at the last moment. It wasn't like him. She was utterly perplexed. She turned back down the sunlit road with disappointment gnawing at her joyous anticipation. He wasn't coming! He wasn't coming! Perhaps he re-

gretted his marriage. . . . She stood, the blue cone-shaped bag of sugar in her hands, and dread sprang up in her. Something had happened to him! Without a second's pause she wheeled round and marched, as though somebody had commanded her, to the Hunton bus. It was not until the bus had started that she thought of his mother.

Stephen's train was quite punctual. He rammed the little edition Dickinson had sent him of the Rowley poems into his pocket, where lay Dickinson's screed on forgery. Poor old Dickinson—the passionate champion of anything with a long "ess" in it! The primitive Saxon must have been a vigorous type of human being, he couldn't help thinking, given to much hissing through the teeth, chewing the beard, crusading and pillaging with all that was left over in him from the savage . . . pre-Roman! Well, the savage was finally rounded and polished down into a Raleigh . . . and then an overdose of the classics bore Pope and Dryden. The ages were billows linked by drifts. Say what one would for democracy, it was the few who gave the color—tipped the wave to catch the long-sight of those who came afterwards. He stopped at a chemist's in Pier Avenue to buy a tooth-brush. The usual Easter influx was already beginning to flow there . . . faces with a sort of release upon them, showing in the eyes and mouths. He wondered what mood Annie would be in, and smiled pensively to think that she was

his now to alter and make happy. He was glad.

The tide was out, so far that it looked like tissue-paper—a crumpled layer in the distance. The sands made a lovely soft line against the red-chalk cliffs. Gulls were wheeling, hardly showing when they flew sunwards and then shining—a bright motioning whiteness—when the sun caught them underwards in their downward sweep. Holiday was in the air. The houses on the promenade were like toy houses, fairy-blown, colored as if they had sprung from a bubble. The day was very gay; the place was very gay after Lenne, light-hearted. One quite expected to hear a band, to see processional folk marching to some merry tune that gave the lie to misery. But the band-stand was empty, and only the dimmest sounds of the town's invasion reached him as he walked upon the high cliff-path. As he climbed the stile into the golf-links he saw a girl coming towards him. Something made him give her a second look . . . it was Isabel Beggary! He could not account for the confusion that overwhelmed him. Instead of raising his hat, he was fingering the tooth-brush in his pocket and staring at her as if she were not quite real. Low, sweet laughter reached him.

"Hullo! Fancy meeting you!" She was a rogue to say that, for she had asked Wilfrid when he was coming.

"How do you do?"

"Very well, thank you!" She became serious

then. "I hear your mother is much the same!"

"She's better. . . . Doctor. . . . Wilfrid assures me that she is!"

She laughed again because he had remembered. "I'm down for a fortnight!"

"So am I!"

They were hardly saying anything, and yet great waves of communication seemed to be passing between them. She turned and walked with him. "I'll see you as far as your bus."

"Oh, thanks! . . . I'm afraid I must hurry!"

"His mother before everybody!" she was thinking. But it wasn't his mother, this time. It was Annie. "How's the school?" she asked casually. She didn't want to hear about the school at all. She wanted him to talk.

Her question made him unsure of her. She hated the school. It was cynical of her to ask. "My class has done better than I expected." It was amazing of Ruse to mix up Maxima Cæsariensis with Flavia Cæsariensis—it spoilt his paper . . . all that, that he needn't have put in, about Diocletian was jolly good. He'd keep an eye on Ruse. "It hasn't been such a bad term!"

"I can see . . ."—her young voice was sharp with challenge—"that you're settling down!"

It angered him. It was extraordinary, the way it angered him. And yet . . . his anger gave her homage. He did not dare to look at her. He did not want to look at her. "I am," he said curtly, glad, with a kind of brutal gladness, that he was going to hurt her, "I'm a married man

now!" The words sprang from him, sharply, as a knife in the hands of a brigand. The way he said them was an assault.

They hung in her ears vibrant and terrible. She was standing still, just as if he had given her a blow. Something, that might have been music —it was so wrought with ecstasy—stood still in her heart. "Fool! Fool! Fool!" she was crying out upon herself, and all life became a weapon. He had walked on, and was coming back to her.

"Isabel!" The laughter had gone, the triumphant beauty. She was pathetic with her drooping hands. "Aren't you going to congratulate me?" He asked it as if he was helping her out of a difficulty.

"I hope you will be happy," she said obediently, and would not meet his eyes.

"It's a secret. . . ."

"It's quite safe with me!" "Oh, quite safe!" she added to herself, "safe as safe!" She nearly hated him—for a moment. "I'll tell nobody! I'll tell nobody!" She should think not! She had every reason. She had been living in the moon. Love was a fraud, it needed speech, like a postage-stamp on a receipt! She had dreamed otherwise—that intensity lit intensity, desire desire, and that the senses had their own inviolate language. Thought apparently recoiled, burned back upon its own origins. You could be sure of nothing in this world except the things you bought and paid for.

"We haven't told my mother!"

"No!" She thanked Heaven for his density—his blessed male density. A woman, a woman could have told. . . . They were walking now upon newly rolled sward, a plane of smooth green on which their forms cast shadows. Their shadows were very close, hers leading . . . that day she was copying those Peruvian things she had had the same feeling—of being close beside him . . . very tense, almost actual it was . . . her drawing had been very good . . . going out of the gates afterwards into Cromwell Road, she had had the feeling of having shared something with him, a—a point of unity in space. And hope had run riot, gaiety pervaded her, joy. . . . She had danced herself off her feet that night—giving incidental rapture to poor old Percy Windam. It was all for this dark young man beside her. She was sufficient of an artist to have no blindness about her emotions.

"She's gone!" he whistled.

She saw nothing but the empty road beyond the hotel face that was stroked with yellow window-boxes—yellow daffodils in window-boxes. "What? The bus!" She caught her breath. It left him with her! And unhesitatingly she knew what she was going to do! "I say, Stephen, there's time . . . come along by the quarry . . . we can look down and watch the sea!"

"I'm rather sick at losing it," he confided, lured by her tone. He could not tell her exactly why—that Annie would be waiting. He turned with her unresistingly.

They went down a narrow lane between thorn hedges that reminded her somehow of Holman Hunt. The field on one side of them was freshly plowed, brown-furrowed, with crows circling it as black bitter thoughts were circling in her mind. A chill had come into the bright cold air. Her body tingled all over . . . she could not squash every bit of physical feeling out of her—the squash was within. Impulse, having intimidated her, was betraying her now into a terrible silence. She could not think how to begin. And while she strove to tell him, reason was ordering her to be quiet, to keep her head and let her pride hold fast. Ah! She didn't care a rap for pride with him—now! She didn't care a rap for humiliation either. Either way there was only wreck. . . .

"And how have you been getting on?"

"Magnificently!" She flung her head up with all the pride she was so near to losing, defiant. "I've never worked so well!"

He bent his eyes upon her, searching her for the roots of her boast. Perhaps he found them, for he turned instantly away.

There was a goat walking, high, on the very edge of the quarry, on thin legs that looked like flower-stems under the fold of the fleet body. "Look!" she cried. She could never see anything poised perfectly without a thrill. "Acrobats never come up to that . . . there's always a fault!"

They paused to watch it climb and leap, discover them, and vanish. The delight they shared went round and round them like threads. She felt

that if they could but stand there forever and ever, all would be made clear between them without a word. But he broke it with disbelief in his voice. "So you've been doing awfully well!"

"Well, haven't you?"

He gave her candor that had no chivalry. "That's no reason. . . ."

"Stephen!" she interrupted ironically, "I'm not copying *you*. I'm telling the truth!"

He had no business to have said it. But—oh, hang it! She made him rude. He wished she hadn't met him. She was so down on him, critical, full of judgment. The worst of it all was that she had a sort of gift for splitting him in two. One half of him—the half that had those dreams—agreed with her.

They were quarreling! It didn't matter. Nothing mattered! The quarry was so deep and abysmal. The world was abysmal when she came to face it; a great chasm yawning beyond her youth into which she was to sink. Enthusiasms would turn to habits. A day would come when what she earned would count for more than the act of earning. It made her feel like giving up art and taking some post where no temptation would come to her to degrade and enslave the work she loved.

"I'm glad."

"Thank you!" Why was he glad? She supposed some ebullient gladness within him had spilled upon her in the moment's accident of being with her. They would never be together again

like this. The thought strung her to clarity . . . she would make the memory clear and enduring. "Tell me . . . about your school!" She looked past him, and past the quarry. The sea was as distant as her desire. The tide would turn, but the tide of her desire would never turn.

"Why do you want to know?" There! He was rude again! He tried to show the apology he could not utter. She had to look at him because he waited, and instantly she felt sorry for him. Her own heart was so sore. How absurd they were to be snapping at each other like a pair of enemies. Her impulse came back, flayed by the futility of half-understandings. "Because," she said, and her brown eyes never flinched, "I am interested in everything you do."

He warmed to her immediately, accusing himself of misjudgment, "That's very nice of you!"

"I wonder if it is. . . ."

"Well, it isn't horrid?" He laughed.

Something behind his laughter made her focus the whole truth. "By 'nice' you mean thoroughly altruistic . . . there's nothing altruistic about it, because. . . ."

"Because what. . . . Isabel!"

"Oh, because . . ." she burst out, "I love you!"

Her eyes became suddenly evasive. She looked away. He could drink his fill of all her face showed him! But what it showed him was not outward and upon her, but inward, within himself! He knew at last why he had hated her opposition, because he wanted her approval! He

knew now why her aloofness on that last terrible day with those awful visitors had stung him like an insult. He knew why he had argued against her in his mind ever afterwards—until Annie came! Good God, he was married to Annie Capgrave! Poor Annie! . . . Not a bird cried, nor a twig cracked to break the quiet air. The sea was there, the land . . . and Isabel Beggary. He drank his fill, indeed, of her then, his eyes like thirsty lips upon her loveliness . . . she wasn't apart, nor too splendid. She was his—if only he had waited to take her. . . . His Christmas holiday had long ago been erased of everything that was not hers. And here was holiday again! "I wish to heavens," he said passionately, "we had not met!"

She never moved when he said that. The tears broke and mounted. Her eyes were dim. A sparrow tweeted somewhere—a tiny note of hunger.

Her quiet tensity reminded him of Annie, with torture. He had rescued one woman but to abandon another! Sir Galahad made fool. . . . Isabel had come first. . . . Oh, blind, blind, blindness! He had to do something. He could not go forward, for she was there. He turned back. "Come," he said, and his voice was oddly level, "I don't want to miss another bus." He had missed a bus that day with Annie, and . . . in the white stupid little chapel . . . he had nearly fallen over a bucket . . . buses seemed to be making tragic sport of him! He thought for a second of

walking home, but it was five miles, and Annie would be waiting, Annie would be waiting.

Behind him, she was covering him with tenderness. He has got a new suit! It fitted him jolly well, she thought; as she watched his tall form with craving she could not conceal coming to the surface of the tenderness. His nearness made him very clear. . . . As they came out of the lane the spring sea-grass edged him against space and engraved him on the plate of her consciousness. He would never be hers. She wondered, then, who the woman was and what she was like—the woman who had won him. But she could not bear to think of her. She caught him up. "Stephen!"

"Yes." He looked straight ahead.

"Forgive me!"

"There is nothing to forgive!" He kept his senses enough not to beg *her* to forgive him. Her voice with its forsaken ring came back to him. And the thought that she should feel humiliation for him was too much for him. "It's rather splendid of you to have told me . . . the awful thing is that . . . it's—too late!" This was as near to full candor as he could come.

No words would come to her to match her tumult. She had been right! He cared! Then nobody ought to have come between them. . . . Oh, what did it all mean!

Immediately they turned the hotel corner he saw Annie coming down from the garage. He quickened his steps and went directly towards her. She saw him almost at once and waved her hand.

When he was near enough she called out, "I thought something had happened to you!"

A great deal had happened to him, he thought bitterly. Nothing that she had conceived about him could encompass his disaster. "It went jolly sharp," he called. "I only waited to buy a toothbrush." A shroud of lead was closing over his spirit. "The blessed thing's too damned punctual!"

And Isabel Beggary saw a squat, middle-aged woman in black, with bare hands in which she held a grocer's blue packet. This could not be Stephen's wife, her mind protested; it could not be! But he was introducing her—"a very old friend."

Her lips said, "Yes, we've known each other since he was twelve and I was ten." Her eyes cast soundings that groped and groped.

The dread that Annie had nursed all the way in the bus became active. She knew that look in the girl's eyes—piercing and questioning and shaded to mask some right in him . . . she had worn it often enough in her own eyes when Harry showed her a stray photograph or some girl's hair—before he burned them. Young she was, beautiful with lovely youth . . . fear became a prophecy. She looked from the girl to Stephen and back again and said nothing, did nothing—except clutch with absurd tightness the sugar she had bought at Hyndman's.

She was making him ridiculous, he somehow felt. It was with an air of smothered impatience

that he said to Isabel, "This is my wife!" He was relieved when Annie put out her hand.

It was sheer instinct, springing from the depths of a nature that always wanted to face the full consequences that made Annie say, "Won't you come back with us—I've left tea all ready!"

That's extraordinarily decent of her, Stephen thought, and sent her the kindest smile.

Now why, Isabel plundered her secret wits, has she done that? She could imagine nothing about this plain, common woman that could have excited love in Stephen. Where had he met her? What had she done to him? In a flash it came to her that he had been trapped—lured by some crude guile into this awful marriage. She looked at him with a great bound of sympathy. Poor old Stephen! He was just the simple, straight sort who would get caught like this. "Thank you, I will come," she answered, and looked at Annie with a look that laid bare the sword between them. But her woe was in no way assuaged by the fact that she could hold her own with the woman. It was terrible . . . terrible. . . . This new aspect stripped the alternative, now that she knew it, of all worth. It left no taste of redemption upon the mouth of her pain. It added misery to misery. It showed Stephen's future a very shallow pan which, when you riddled it, gave scarcely any gold. . . .

They sat in front of him in the bus, so that he was compelled to see the difference between them. Annie's straight shoulders, the white edge of lawn

upon her high-necked blouse, the hat—like the hats you see when orphans go for a walk, her stiff manner! Isabel's younger back with the silver fox-tail dipping over her shoulder—he smelt the scent of it every time he stooped to catch what they were saying—her throat, creamy between the fur and her soft silky hair, the squashed hat swathed with ribbon that made him think of Rising Heights in autumn. Annie was black-white, slow.... Isabel all pulse and color. He laughed to himself. It was a kind of joke. The Greeks were right! The whole meaning of life was to strain man's spirit . . . the gods had long fingers.

The sunlight was woven into evening as they went up the street of Slepe, the old straggling houses with their irregular pointed roofs, and gardens like vaguely patterned handkerchiefs, lay dusk-wrapped on either side; the forge showed forms of men dark-carved against a furnace panel, a horse whinnied, and, far away, wheels were rumbling a chorus to the cloppa-cloppa of slow hoofs.

Annie went in first, leaving the door open for Stephen to hold for Isabel Beggary. She was concerned about Mrs. Host. "Did you think I was lost?" she asked, in a whisper, pausing on the threshold of the firelit room. Her unaccustomed eyes did not see Mrs. Host as clearly as Mrs. Host saw her. "Here's Stephen . . . and a friend. I met them!" She could not bring herself to explain why she had gone all the way to Hunton.

"So that's why he was late!" Mrs. Host thought as he kissed her. "He has been to the Roper's first." She wished Mrs. Capgrave would hurry up and light the lamp. The girl's voice was musical, clear, the high notes pitched to keep the quiet of the invalid room.

"How do you do, Mrs. Host? I've been asked to tea."

He might have waited. Really he might have waited . . . she saw so little of him. Oh! Why wasn't Mrs. Capgrave lighting the lamp! The kettle could wait, the fire was perfect . . . there was no need for her to fidget over it as if it were a sick child.

"I hope you will soon be better!"

They all said that. It made a formula of hope.

"If I had known I was coming, I'd have brought you some chrysanthemums and lilies. I brought a sheaf for my sister . . . she's going to have a baby. . . ." And, just as if Mrs. Host had made a comment, she nodded and added ". . . in May—a jolly time to come!" She was talking at random, saying instinctively what she thought was right for Mrs. Host. But into her carelessness came a sudden sympathy. His mother was also out in the cold. She did not even know his secret. It was mean of them—of *her*—to cheat her like that—on her death-bed.

Stephen brought the lamp in, adjusting the shade. For one second the light flashed on the girl's face. And Mrs. Host saw then, the tenderest pity—pity born from defeat. The sweetness

melted her prejudice and forced praise to the very edge of her dumbness. She's a lovely thing, like some bright, lovely flower . . . no wonder, Stephen. . . . She looked across at him and caught his gaze on Mrs. Capgrave. A peculiar look, half-blame, half-forgiveness. Good gracious! She exclaimed inside herself, have they been quarreling! Her wits sharpened to take in the three of them. Oh, for some power that could ask and be answered! Not this terrible game of symbols and appearances. Why weren't they talking? Stephen had put down the lamp and picked it up again twice. Mrs. Capgrave was making the tea; and the girl, Isabel Beggary, having paid her dues, was fidgeting with her gloves. Had Stephen lost his manners! It was the greatest relief to her when he spoke.

"I haven't seen your sister since . . . since you went back."

"I know. Wilfrid told me. She would have been quite cross if you'd bothered. She thinks your place is here . . ."—she gave the end to Mrs. Host—"with you!"

They give me everything on the surface, Eleanor Host protested, everything. I wish I could reach their hearts. All the time their own lives are going on . . . going on.

"I always put the milk in first, it improves the flavor. I haven't given you sugar." Annie's voice was as practical as if she were repeating a recipe.

Stephen had offered her a chair at last. Isabel

Beggary took the teacup from him. Their hands touched on the saucer. Almost imperceptibly the girl's ripe mouth tightened at the corners. The eyes she raised to Stephen were begging for something—like a child's eyes—at the mercy of some whim. Something had happened to her. She hadn't laughed once . . . and now Stephen had seen and was answering her, granting her wish—with his eyes. She had been right from the beginning. . . . So this was the girl! This was the girl! And she hardly knew her . . . did not know her at all, she remembered, below her quick modern manner . . . her way of saying things that were not perhaps so callous as they sounded. She would certainly make Stephen go the pace—how exactly, she could not tell. She could only hope it would not be just a round of silly social things that could only lead him into inertia and nausea. She had known from the beginning . . . it was quite cute of her. A sort of desire for vindication made her look at Mrs. Capgrave.

Annie, too, had seen Stephen's eyes burn back their answer. All that she feared was confirmed in that look. At first, with the first dart of the truth, she nearly lost her head. She had to strangle the impulse to cry out to the girl—leave him alone! He's mine! Hot on the heels of that came another impulse—to get up and walk out of the room, out of the house—out of their lives . . . it was then that she turned to Mrs. Host and found the poor eager eyes strained, asking her something. "What is it?" she asked gently. It

was preservation of his mother that made her say to Stephen, authoritatively, "Stephen, do look at the lamp—isn't it glaring?"

Isabel smiled at her cynically. Her thoughts were harsh. The voice of the Possessor! She was a dominating woman—the way she spoke betrayed her. A blaze of anger ran across her loss. A mood to hurt and tear, to blast wrong fact from right might-have-been came over her, and made her say without taking time to reason, "I . . ." she nearly said Mrs. Host, "I wish we could have a talk!"

"A talk," Annie repeated, and unbent her mind to give her credit for honesty. "I should like a talk with you."

"Don't, Annie!" It slipped out from him because of his fright that they were going to quarrel over him!

"Annie," Mrs. Host repeated. So he calls her Annie . . . she wished she could sit up and see them better. Stephen had dropped quite a large piece of his anchovy sandwich . . . there now, he was going to tramp on it . . . he didn't see . . . she screamed at him, screamed and screamed—and did not break the silence. They had forgotten to give Isabel a plate. Her slab of cake was too large for her saucer . . . those old Limoges saucers were always rather silly. . . .

"He's afraid!" Isabel Beggary laughed at last, all the music tripped by some taunt in her mirth.

Mrs. Capgrave. . . . Annie . . . wasn't eating anything at all, just sipping and sipping. She

wondered, with a queer distorted wonder, if they knew how stupid they were, how much they were telling her! Insight wrought her mind to a wisdom that showed to the girl as darkest subtlety. "I don't suppose," she said dryly, between the sips, "that we will talk about you at all!" She was glad when Stephen came to the rescue, reminding them all of the one they had forgotten.

"My class, mother, has done awfully well. . . . I was telling Isabel. . . ."

"You've taken a long time to tell me," she said to him, behind her eyes. Fatigue fell on her—an excessive weariness. There was something that dropped out of life occasionally, some incessant hope that sagged suddenly and left one—lonely . . . seeing eternity through so mean a crack that all the angels and the kind saints who had known humanity were not to be seen, none of the emperors one knew were there, nor kings, nor poets . . . there was only the loneliness, the terrible heart-breaking loneliness . . . illness made one fight—this—to a finish, one wore hope for a bedwrapper . . . she felt like crying, the tears were scalding hot somewhere within her . . . she wished Stephen would put his arms round her and send those . . . other two out of the room, and then the lamp went out. . . . She thought it was Annie's voice that was crying "Mother! Mother!"

It was not the lamp on the table that had gone out. It was the lamp of life that had dipped its wick to catch the remaining measure of oil in poor Mrs. Host's soul. Annie saw her first. Nothing

had altered, her stillness was the same, her poor form still made the faintest billow beneath the red cover, only her lids were down—like shutters.

Once more Stephen and she were united across the frail body. She had cried out for the doctor —and Isabel Beggary had gone.

CHAPTER VII

GRAY morning! Gray morning! She was alone—with the dead. Dr. Roper had come and gone. Stephen had gone out. He had murmured something about his father's grave in the old churchyard up on the hill. She thought he had gone there . . . to be alone. She felt wan as the cold woman who lay between the clean sheets —drained, emptied of feeling. The room was dim behind the holland blind. The day outside was sunless. The pennies upon the poor weighted eyes were two dark discs of peace. She wondered if the soul that was clad by such a frozen cloak was strange with surprise—or just, as yet, asleep! The moment Stephen had gone she had asked for forgiveness; standing with clasped hands before the tribunal of silence. "It was only because of love!" she had pleaded, and knew that death adjusted all misunderstandings. Life seemed a little thing, timid, tortured with unready effort before this new unanswering in which no heart-beat was fraught with disobedient nerves. Mechanically, she stooped, squeezed the sponge out of the enamel basin on the chair, and wiped her hands. The fold of the sheet beneath the clasped hands was slightly crooked. She

straightened it. The red eiderdown was heaped on the old armchair with the beaded cushions. On the top of the cabinet the row of uneven-sized bottles—high and low labels upon multi-colored glass—looked somehow like a Venetian necklace from which somebody had drawn the string . . . desertion was a ghost in the room. . . .

She was in the hall, with the basin in her hand, when the bell rang. It was Isabel Beggary.

"Is Stephen in?"

"No. He has gone out." They stood, facing each other, not across the doorstep of the quiet house, but across the interminable division between their mortal beings.

"I wanted to see him. My brother-in-law told me. . . ."

Homage to the dead made Annie offer bare courtesy. "Would you like to see her . . . she looks very peaceful."

Isabel was afraid of death. She hesitated, but Annie had turned, and she had to follow. To her, the room was terrible in its shade. Sculpture, that cold art, gave her the same feeling. The lined quiet face was sculptured. The nose showed an accentuated line, the sunken eyeless sockets, the lip-fold, curved as if the flesh were stony congealed substance unmeant for speech, for blame, for endearment. "Death"—she shivered in her furs—"is terrible!"

"It brings peace—an end!" The dignity of the ending unfolded Annie's mind into promise.

It was beautiful to be smoothed out into this untortured folding of the hands, this stillness before the vision. . . .

Isabel's youth had not escaped the impatient realm. To wait, and wait—for that! Back into her ears came Stephen's stinging phrase last night, "You ought not to have come! You ought not to have come!" Stinging her because it was stung from him. He blamed her! In her heart he blamed her, she knew—for this! It was unjust. She could not bear his blame. On top of this other woman's deceit all that she might have been guilty of in afflicting his mother was intangible and of slight avail. All night long she had stored up his words, his look, and stormed against them. Her senses were a blind tumult of despair. No ease would come to her until she had had it out with him, until he withdrew into an acknowledged comprehension of her sympathy—her more than sympathy. She had spoken wildly about his mother. That was because her thought of him was such a fiery sword that she had to smite everything and everybody that impeded him.

"Anyhow," she said, and her red mouth was wry with bitter meaning, "Stephen must be very grateful for all you've done!" She wanted to strain her hurt until it snapped.

Annie kept a wise silence. Her own simplicity was alert before this bright subtle creature who had all the power.

"Ah," thought the girl, "she takes it all for

granted!" And it was as though an enemy had smiled across the bars of prison. "But you've got him!"

"Got him!" Annie turned the accusing accent over.

"I don't know how you managed it!" What wild words was she saying? They were said! Oh, they were said! What did it matter—she deserved it!

"Managed it!" Annie repeated. Her spirit was out upon a plane of resignation where all was sorrow—where fruit hung like colored webs, crumbling at a touch. It made the real unreal. She spoke slowly, knowing that in that slow place of beholding there was plenty of time to leave the truth to wander.

"Yes, managed it!" Isabel said daringly, offering no escape, and spread the phrase to the very roots of her acquisition of Stephen.

She spread it to the roots of Annie's sensitive conscience. Had she "managed it"? Had she, by her weak powerlessness to hide from him, lured him across Harry's loss to his own capture? Had she? Had she? "I don't think," she said meditatively, weighing everything, "that I did . . . it happened."

"Oh, it couldn't!" the girl burst out, "it couldn't! He couldn't love two of us—like that!"

She might have said then, and ended everything, "I am his wife now." But she wanted the essence, not the label. "How do you know he loves you?" Even being his wife gave her no

right to ask that. The girl had driven her. It was disloyal to Stephen.

"Ah!" Her laugh rang like a shield before provocation, "Ask him!"

And Annie knew what his answer, if she cornered him, would be. She would never corner him. The evidence was heaped upon her. All that he had not done last night laid waste her desire to think otherwise. His hands had not answered her hands, nor his eyes her eyes. When, at last, all was over, and she had put her arm round his shoulder saying words that were a comfort, his stiff despair that broke neither word nor motion from him was not, she knew, all for his mother, although it was all upon the threshold of his mother's loss. She was not deceived. But what was she to do? What ought she to do? Action was not hers alone—it was his as well. If this marriage had—been contrived . . . then it had taken two of them! The chapel with the black-green yews. . . . "I do. Do you?" Oh! What was *he* thinking of? But she could not accuse him. Justice, which sees nothing, forced her to his acquittal. It made her raise her own blade of defense before the girl. "I have his word!"

By what means had he given it! All that his "word" meant in terms of legality was borne in upon her. "Yes! Oh, you've got him tied up —thoroughly tied up!" Something in Annie's face shot her into a second's mercy, and then pitched her from sanity to grotesque humor.

What fools they were! They were quarreling—like those funny exasperated people one reads about in the Sunday papers who fought each other over the possession of the furniture and old china that belonged to the dead. And then, because her wits were utterly out of hand, she was thinking of the refectory table in Hallam Clegg's studio . . . nasturtiums in a pewter jar . . . somebody's voice saying, "Give it up! Give it up!" She could not give him up with any saint's meekness—renouncing the goods of this world. "I wonder," she said, and sent scorn into her eyes, "what you mean to do with him!"

"Take care of him," Annie answered on the moment, her heart urging her to proof. The girl's laughter tore the proof to ribbons.

"Take care of him! That's the last thing he needs. But, you couldn't tell. You're not. . . . I don't suppose you've had an exhaustive education. . . ." She was deliberately cruel.

"No." The terror of the things she did not know and could not understand besieged her.

"It would be difficult for you to realize how clever he is. . . . he's got genius."

She could not put his value into the same terms as Isabel Beggary, but it was not true that she was unaware of it.

"What he needs is to be cast out—upon himself—to be made to create!"

"But his book. . . ."

"Oh, that!"

And before the dismissal every vestige of her

understanding of him seemed to vanish. If she could furnish no need for him then, what was she worth to him? "Men need women . . ." she began, and could think only of Harry.

"They need love. . . ." At the word "love" her voice became gentle, scattered its harshness. She looked at Annie with tragedy reaching her eyes. "Oh, I'm a beast. I'm hurting you. I'm hurting myself, but it is . . . . what are we to do?" She strained out to the profundities in each of them. "We both care . . . but I feel I count more, for him, than you. I'm more his age. . . . I know his mind . . . but he's yours! He's yours!"

It did not suffice for Annie that she knew his heart. She looked at the stiff face of his mother with sad appeal. And it blazed out upon her from the cold walls of that silent soul that she was not meant to take him. It had been a mistake, a great mistake. It semed to her that Mrs. Host had joined Harry, and that those two were asking, asking, asking something that she could not answer without a stain. All those years with Harry . . . and now Stephen . . . it was as if, like a harlot, she had brought a stranger across her threshold singing some song of need that made the eventide a dirge for remembrance. She surged to revocation. The wedding-ring on her finger was like a lock of which she would never find the key. She turned to the girl with old wisdom ageing her face. She wanted to cry out, take him, take him—if he wants—and end it.

What she really said, pushing the damp clinging hair off her forehead, was, "I've been up all night!" It was a cry of defeat.

In a moment of perception Isabel's youth quivered, stretched, and caught the tragedy of frustration. One half of the world showed a woman's face strained, like Dido's, across an eternal sea. This woman's gain was wrecked from the beginning. "Ah, well!" She sighed and pulled her furs close to her throat. "We seem to be in for it. . . ." And then, with sarcasm biting her young voice, "I'm the unnecessary one. . . . I suppose I ought to commit suicide and give the—the drama its full flavor." The grief in her eyes gave her flippancy denial.

Pity sprang from Annie's fatigue. "Oh, my dear!" was wrung from her, and the words beat like a pulse of pain.

Sympathy was the last thing Isabel wanted from *her*. At the door she paused. "Has Stephen gone to Hunton?" She might meet him.

"No." Annie answered unsteadily, and stated the bare truth. "I don't know where he has gone. I think, to Rising graveyard . . . on the hill." And Isabel looked at her as if she were telling a lie.

She waited until the front door shut. She never moved. Only her eyes went on a journey, pausing at objects as at stations in her misery . . . the queer cairned flints, that Stephen was always going to sort out and tidy, mocked her behind the cabinet's diamond panes, the big-bellied god; pur-

ple cherries hung from lucid leaves on the bulge of the gold-rimmed bowl; the celery-shaped leaves, faded to blue, on the embroidered fender-stool; the silk-scalloped lamp-mat, the prisms that fell into silver columns in the gray light of the room . . . all these things were Stephen's. She could not imagine what he would do with them. And not for a second did she regard them with possession. She kept her eyes away from the bed for as long as she could. But she had to look . . . the visible face was unaltered. It seemed to her that a new meaning infused that dead presence, and that Stephen's mother, having communed with Harry and witnessed the recent scene with Isabel Beggary—the girl who had swept like a whirlwind into her settlement, understood at last . . . and trusted her! Arguments came to life in Annie's poor tired brain. What a fool she was to let the girl have her own way. There was the right and wrong of the situation that remained. Stephen and she were married. They had to make the best of it. They must make the best of it. She would shirk nothing, hide nothing . . . she would tell him directly he came in and beg him to help her, as she would help him, to carry their marriage through. His mother's wishes were finished now, like chased metal, into their final pattern. Yes, she would hold him. Her love kept its own count with him. That she could make him happy, she never doubted, once the girl was settled and done with. And yet the girl was so sure . . . so certain. She

saw her face in the over-mantel, tired into the design of the age she would not be able to escape. Old, old, old, old she was! Looking at herself like this, fresh upon the vision of a young face that was lovely even its anger, she saw herself—as Stephen would see her. She had no chance! No chance at all. But she would try. It was her duty to his mother to try. . . .

She would tidy up, and prepare a cold dinner, and go out to meet him. In the open, in the cold air, she would feel better.

She had seen the graveyard, white-flecked like a day's washing upon the hillside. As she took the high road that led round the butcher's corner, she wondered if the distance was one mile or two, and if Stephen had really gone there. The day was without a gleam of sun. The sky was carrying rain in clouds that looked like dangling packets, wind-blown, and nearly ready to burst. A wych-elm, its bare branches swept hillwards like a directing hand, decided her. She would go as far as the graveyard and come straight back if he weren't there. Half a mile onwards, as she stood on a road-bridge, watching the brown waters whirl and whiten through the arches below her, an instinct made her look up suddenly and see him coming towards her. He did not see her, or, if seeing her, he did not know it was she. Straight, he was, as the pines, and tense, she noticed, his hands rammed into his coat pockets, his shoulders rigid above his body's motion. She waited for him without hail. Above her were the

Fairey Woods; below her Rising Slepe. Here, between, she was waiting for him—for fate. The Risings had always been a dream to her, a place of beauty, of wonder, of magic and uplifted heart. They had come into her girlhood with a mood of exaltation that she could never, to her dying day, forget . . . horizon against a June twilight . . . a rapturous song . . . initiation . . . a mood when life bends one to its secret, says "this" and "this," and leaves the whole world to follow! And here she was with heart-break in the world that had come. There were the irrevocable horizons against a sky as chilly and bereft of hope as the dead. Something told her that he had seen her. Let him call, she thought. I will answer. But no voice greeted her. Down there . . . out of the eddies, she saw the spread leaves of water-musk. In August the yellow faces would float upon the waters. . . .

"Hullo, Annie!"

She might have been the butcher's boy, so casual was his voice. "Hullo, Stephen!" she copied, offering a passive match to his mood.

He stopped close to her, out of reach, "Why have you come?"

Everything he said she had to weigh now, to separate meaning from meaning. If there had been nothing but grief for his mother between them, he would have welcomed her, been glad. Ah! There was no use hiding anything. It was wiser to have it all out with him—to make no mistakes. She was not complex enough to deal

with secret upon secret. "Isabel Beggary came . . . she wanted to see you."

He merely stared at her with foolish bewilderment. "In the name of God," he almost said aloud, "does she want to ruin us—drive us all mad!" His sworn allegiance to Annie made him harsh with her. "Why have you come? Is she waiting?"

"No, she has gone." She found it terribly difficult to begin. He made her feel like a fool on whom a trick has been played. Her hands on the stone parapet were quite cold. "Look," she exclaimed, clutching at the mercy of a distraction, "there's a kestrel ready to pounce—shout at him!" She pointed beyond the water-willows.

He waved his arms and shouted. "That's done it . . . the little scoundrel!" Together they watched the bird's poise break and wings flutter to his flight. "What eyes you've got!"

"I've always had a good eye . . . so had my father."

"They must live . . ." he began the eternal apology.

"And let live," she capped.

"But if it's not in their nature!"

She was silent. She could only accept this doctrine of uncharitableness . . . birds or human beings, they had to keep to their natures. Perhaps they all did without knowing. Isabel Beggary was only keeping true to hers in wanting Stephen. "Stephen . . . I came out to meet you

because there's something I want to say to you."

"What?"

He made it very hard, standing there with a kind of blame in his expression—as though she were the wrecker. The girl would agree with him. They arraigned her together. "Isabel Beggary told me. . . ." For the life of her she could not get the words to come, they choked and strangled in the dryness of her throat.

"What?"

She almost begged him, then, to be kind. He was like a magistrate. She looked up to Rising Heights . . . the pines were waving plumes . . . "that you love each other." In the silence she felt that every tree was marching down upon her, helmeted and armed.

"It's true." He caught the color of her own honor and gave her truth for truth. And he, too, could not look at her. He could only marvel with excessive bitterness at the power that had come to him to wound her.

"Stephen!"

He had to look. Her voice bled pity—a salt drop upon his stoniness. And when he looked his strength came back to him, giving him control and mercy. "Blame me! Blame me!" he appealed, and gave the weapon into her hands. "I did not know—in time."

"My dear!" And this was the Annie who had roused his love, who would never fail to rouse it when her character was lit to the depths like

some lamp in a sanctuary. "I have no blame . . . for you . . . for her . . . for any of us. . . . What are we to do?"

When she said that, pointing so simply to the issue, he saw but one thing, and that one thing was not of the wild essence and despair of Isabel Beggary's desire. It was the duty his mother would have sanctioned. It was his duty towards this woman . . . this wife. "Nothing," he said. His voice was hollow as an echo. "We've got to face things. I expect you can trust me."

Experience told her that when a man leaves everything to a woman's trust in him, his trust in himself is far gone. But as she watched him a sense of protection pervaded her. If she helped him. If she was very wise—wiser than she had ever needed to be with Harry . . . if the girl would go and never come back. . . . "It isn't trust, Stephen . . . if you go on meeting her!"

"I haven't been meeting her!"

"No?" She knew so little. "Doesn't she live here?"

He gave her a complete answer. "When I leave here, when everything's sold up, I don't suppose I'll ever see her again."

"She wants to see you."

He pondered that before he spoke. "Well, I suppose she has a—a sort of right to ask. I'll see her once . . . and after that!" He wanted to wipe out the anger between them.

"After that!" she repeated. But in her mind she believed that once that was over her oppor-

tunity would come. In the meantime there was the funeral, a hundred things to be done. "Do!" she assented. "Do see her! It may be best." She felt that her own worth would help to hold him. The girl would be bitter, and her bitterness would be sure to drive him to her defense. She was generous. She was giving him all that he was asking for. God would help her cause because it was just. She did not tell him, as another woman might have done, of the unkind things Isabel had said—the things that were not so unjust as untrue. She had no brief to antagonize the girl in his thoughts. And, as if her soul was offering guile as balm, she said, making him think of necessities, "The undertakers have been." She saw the foot-rule with the man's thumb upon it —the action that measured the body through which the life-span had run. "She was five feet six." "Five feet six! I thought she was more." The world of practical affairs buzzed about their ears. Their spirits returned into the traffic of arrangements. He scarcely noticed how his dread of confession had gone out like a naphtha flare that is held unneeded in the sunlight. All that he had repulsed last night—her goodness, the way she spent herself, that strange closeness of her lips that was almost a smile, the dark glow of her grave eyes—overwhelmed him like the splendid quality of a sister. That was really how he loved her—because she was there . . . without desire. He did love her, not hate her, as he had so nearly convinced himself up there on the hill. He moved

beside her. The water was in full stream, white-mouthed against the reeds. It flowed and flowed, running with its quick thirst to the sea that waited. Nature was simple—just hunger and thirst and appeasement. It was mankind that was not simple, complex, loaded with difficulties that made a tempest where no tempest was. "Annie, you ought to know. It's quite true that I've known Isabel since I was—since we were children, but I didn't see her for years until last Christmas. . . . I saw her every day . . . she never showed. . . . I wouldn't let myself admit that I cared. But I did. I know now. I cared from the beginning. I think I loved her . . . when she was ten and I was twelve, and I've kept it up ever since—until I was so used to it that I didn't see it as it was when we met again."

"But last Christmas . . ." she began.

"Nothing happened. It was a sort of muddle."

She was trying hard to find where the fault lay, which of them it was who had played in the wrong place.

"It was yesterday . . . we met on the golf-links."

"Didn't you tell her?"

"I did."

Remorse almost blazed to blame in her thoughts. Why couldn't it have rested there? She remembered, as one remembers a joke in odd places, the cake she had made . . . the angelica and almonds, the care she had bestowed on the

sandwiches he liked, the cloth with the Queen Anne sugar-basin it had taken her nearly an hour to clean. It was like a century ago, like another life in which his mother held her share of endurance. It made her realize the extent of her repulsion of Harry . . . because of this young stranger, Stephen Host! And yet, he was no stranger, for the love she bore him was but the love she had borne Harry transfused and reborn. Between them, she was suspended. Emotion dropped out of her. A kind of sleep that made the present vague with exhaustion. "What I can't make out," she said wearily, "is why . . . why you . . . oh, me . . . about me?"

He had been asking himself that question ever since yesterday. He had mistaken pity for desire. It was not until Isabel Beggary's revelation that he knew what desire was . . . the hunger and thirst for possession. "I don't know." He sought no subterfuge with her. "I seemed to surrender to. . . ."

"I know!" He had told her everything. The passion she had wound round him, the passion she could not help, had been a trap. Deep, beneath all the excuses she had tried to accept, she knew that it was she who had wooed him. It would have been all right if she could have kept him simply . . . now it was confused into torture in which three of them writhed and whirled like the waters beneath. There were only two arches. . . .

He looked at her compassionately. Her profile was towards him, the ivory skin was ashen, he saw the down around her lips. He put his arm about her. "But you know, Annie, I love you. I can't explain it. There it is."

His manner, his accent, his speech, made her feel that she might have been his mother. She was nearly old enough. Her love sprang a new root. It was as though he had poured a libation into her parched heart. "I am content." She had to be. It was her nature to make the most of the actual, to accept and beautify the ordeal. So long as he remained with her, she would be able to keep and hold an endeavor that would be an offering to God. "Come!"—she spoke quietly—"let us go home." And in the next breath she was telling him the things she had laid ready for his dinner.

The necessity for him to go into Hunton could not be put off. Annie had reminded him twice. He did not want to go. Was he afraid of meeting Isabel? He wanted to meet her . . . his mind reflected her image from every thought until his need for her became so great that it wiped out the pain about his mother. His mother seemed only to be asleep. . . . Isabel Beggary was awake.

The gray day was beginning to darken when he went.

And there, at the turn of the lane below the garage, she was waiting. It was as if she had never moved since yesterday. . . .

"I knew you would come. I waited yesterday . . . she told me you had gone up in the Risings!"

"So I had!" Annie's truthfulness went to and fro between them. He crossed the breach that separated them. "Why did you tell Annie? There was no need." He meant that there was no need to have made Annie suffer as well as themselves.

She did not see it like that. "I think there was every need. The—the special circumstances support her well enough to help her to bear it."

He could not bear her sarcasm—the sharpness that was twisted out of her sad sweetness filled him with despair. He did not answer. They walked towards the quarry as if they had made an assignation. This was the last time that they would be together . . . the gulls were coming inward, breaking the evening air with cries and wings that beat a rhythm, trochaic, up and down. The quarry was a barricade on the edge of the world; they were marching towards it as towards a last defense. Where the lane was gutted with winter wheels she walked in front of him. She was wearing a cape that was the color of the dusk; its fullness blew back from her shoulders, and above it her dusky head and half-turned face were as the head and face of a winged vision . . . all his life he had been waiting for—this! Around them was the salt scent of the sea, the distant murmur; the salt-washed grass moved as a fringe . . . it was beauty inarticulate, soul-sped and

ravishing . . . for him, she was its clothing body. . . . "Isabel! Isabel!" he cried.

She went on, showing no heed, storing the cry in her heart.

If she had turned then, he might have been appeased. He followed—as one follows a dream, pursuing but doomed to disillusion. At the quarry edge he took her into his arms. . . .

His embrace held her until a stone, or loosened slate, tumbled down the abyss that was like a vast bowl behind them. He drew her away into safety. Absurdly, with the mind's habit of stringing the beads of mockery upon a crisis, he thought, "the stone that puts the stars to flight." He said it aloud to her.

"You silly! Every shop-boy uses Omar for these occasions . . . and it isn't true!" Her voice was full of laughter, low, treacherous with love.

"What isn't true?" He asked for the joy of asking her, holding her still.

"The stars haven't been put to flight!"

"No. They haven't come out yet."

They haven't come out yet, her thoughts echoed, and turned the happy torment into a prophecy. "They are to come!" she whispered.

He groaned. The moment made its circle in eternity. Over her shoulder the quarry tempted him. . . . Menelaus before the walls . . . every man's Helen. Troy was Truth on which they wrecked . . . the quarry rounded up then, captured the sky with strange ecstasy, the cloud-

wrapped windowed trees became minarets in which a bell was about to toll. . . . Annie's face was there, in the belfry . . . the bell-ropes in her hands. He pushed her away . . . but it was Isabel he had pushed away. His voice sounded in his ears as hoarse as an old, old man's. "My God . . . we must end it . . . you've got to go!"

"Where? Where?" she was asking herself. The old enthusiasms were dead. He, who could not take herself, had taken everything that made life endurable without him. There was only a void in which she would be lost, following every wind, every voice, seeking, seeking, seeking and never finding. "Yes," she said, "I'm the one that's got to go."

"I am bound to Annie."

She laughed with the mirth of a vixen. "A man's sense of honor!"

He bridled. The bit hurt. "It isn't only because . . ."

"Oh yes, it is!" she argued. "Do you mean to tell me, Stephen, that if you weren't married to her you'd hesitate to take me?"

He could make no denial. He wanted to tell her about Annie. "She was married to a sailor . . . he was drowned. . . ."

"I can't imagine how you—succumbed to her charms." She didn't care how she lashed out at him. His hurt could not be greater than her own. The fact that she had already had a husband but added to the load of Annie's intrigue. "To look at . . . and intellectually . . . ?"

"Don't!" he cried out, and silenced her. The Annie he had seen under the gas-jet in the hall was his justification.

"I can't think . . ."—she carried the comparison to its most jealous point—"what you could see in me . . . after her. I suppose you regard me as—oh . . . !—well, men have recourse to barmaids!"

He felt like shaking her, crushing her. His arms were strapped by his will.

She went on ruthlessly, her hard young voice routing his last sense of right. "I can see you! Rising Slepe for life, little walks in the evening when you get home—and have eaten your suet-pudding, an hour and a quarter or two hours and a quarter—as she allows you—of the book that, being your father's, you may yet be able to hand on to your son . . . you'll get fat and have to take pills out of a glass tube . . . one after every meal. . . ."

"For Heaven's sake!" he exploded, and pulled her fiercely against him. Her face was wet against his lips. "My love! My love!" Her tears wrought him to agony.

"I can't give you up, Stephen . . . it's too hard. . . . I've nobody! I wouldn't mind so much if old Hughie were alive. . . . I'd go out to him to Putumayo and live it down. . . . I can't go on with the things I've been doing. I've got to break, but how . . . how . . . tell me!" She was hysterical, clutching at him.

The cognition of the grown and unfamiliar

Hughie in Putumayo splashed his consciousness and precipitated him on to her "how?"—ringing its alarm, rousing his fears. She was daft with love, desperate . . . her eyes were darkly infused with the light of her terror. In touching her he was caught in the same flames. His senses were strung and racked to the most perfect match of her desire. Everything vanished from them except each other . . . and this pain that was got upon the wildest bliss. She stood away from him, her faith made whole, calmed by his manifestation of real feeling for her. "We were meant for each other!" An afterthought occurred to her. "How long have you been married?"

"Only last Wednesday. . . . As a matter of fact . . ."—he hesitated—"we left each other at the church."

It reminded her of a vulgar song.

"The marriage hasn't been, what you call, consummated!" He laughed huskily, and caught the edge of her cape with his hands as if to make sure that the twilight had not melted her.

"Stephen!"

He knew what was coming, gave it battle—an instant's dash, and then her closeness blinded him. The sword dropped in his hands. "Yes."

"Let's go off together!"

His silence upbraided her. She went near and put her hands upon his shoulders. Her voice was passionate, spilling music upon every denial that might come. "We must! We must—we have every right!"

A gun boomed out upon the sea, a dog barked, barked again and deepened the silence . . . the light was sinking, sinking. The trees were no longer recognizable, they were animated with a dim power that made them listen and communicate . . . a curtain had fallen upon the world they knew.

It seemed years before he spoke. He was trying with all the strength of his mentality to think of Annie, to recapture his mood with her, his sanity wherein he could keep without violation his peace with his dead mother. But the mood evaded him. And Annie was no longer Annie, but an embodied force of frustration. But he tried—the words were like marionettes upon his lips. "We mustn't yield. What's done is done. Don't you see?"

She saw only too well. She saw, beyond his seeing, to the justifications that were real. "You aren't hers . . . you're mine . . . we are each other's!"

"But I've promised. She told me . . ."

"She's scored her innings!"

He could not remember that Annie had "scored any innings." She had said, "I am content." Isabel would never be content. "You don't know her. She's straight as a die!"

"I'm sure she is! I expect she goes to church regularly!"

"She does!"

He was looking at her as if she had committed some transgression. The idea of his defending a

church-going wife struck her as comic, outrageously comic. But when she tried to laugh, nothing but vexed tears would come. She sat down suddenly, huddled her face and arms upon her knees and wept—not loudly, she was trying to stop them—silent, slow tears, she could not control.

It was more than he could bear. She was a figure of grief making a dark human shadow in the mist. "Isabel . . . I'll ask her . . . to let me go. . . ."

She raised her head, caught a gleam, like the gleam out of a sepulcher. "Let me come with you! Let us go now! She cannot . . ." She broke off without ending, remembering that she hardly knew the woman. In the scene with her yesterday, it was not she, but Annie who had won. It was Annie, in the end, who had still something to offer. But she knew that there must be no withdrawal. The three of them had to meet. She rose, and it was she who led the way. They were like a pair of pilgrims on the rough roadway, stumbling in the dusk, clinging to each other, saying nothing—spurred by the inevitable and the flayed purpose in their hearts. All the way in the bus she kept her arm in his. Fate, drawing mirth from the occasion, made her say as they passed a white-washed chapel, "What funny yews—like sentinels!" She half expected to be challenged for a password. Stephen went on without looking. He thought of Orestes when the women twitted him in the courtyard . . . misery gnawed

at him, provisioning a choice that would make none of them happy. He could do nothing. He was like a leaden race-horse on a painted disc—whirling, whirling at the mercy of a hand. . . .

Annie had pulled the bed out from the corner between the window and the fireplace, facing the door, into the center of the room. As the room emptied of daylight the whiteness was exaggerated . . . the white roses of Potiphar were always luminous in the dusk . . . the room shrank into this white stillness of the dead until there was nothing but a white space floating upon the darkness as upon a pool. She could not bear that the bright glare of the reading-lamp should disturb that harmony, that quiet, accentuated peace that reminded her of an altar. She brought a candle, and lit it, then a second candle, and placed them one on each side of the head on which the gray hair looked like a plaited silver wreath. She had put the portrait of the child Stephen into the clasped hands. The light made a soft radiance upon one half of the bed. It seemed to her that the poor shrouded feet were chilly out of the warmth. She went into the kitchen, holding lighted matches in her hands, and brought two more candles. . . . The light now reached to the ceiling in four pointed pillars and hung cressets there upon a canopy of rightness. She had cleaned the room, polished everything. But she had not lit the fire, for it seemed to her a sacrilege that a fire should burn upon the hearth of the departed. She had taken the pendulum out of the old French

clock. Nothing disturbed the homage of the room's stillness.

But outside the room the house was a house of mourning, shut and dark as a prison. Under the shelter of the evening she opened the front door and stood, drawing in the cold, fresh air. Her hands were hot from the day's labor. Her soul was sore with the day's grief; yet resigned, for she had some glimmer of the path she was about to tread. Two people came down the road. They were not speaking. Their forms showed as if they were cut in canvas above the privet hedge. Their silence, their swift passing, filled her with a queer blind pity. A sadness that went out towards all human beings who could go only little distances with a sense of certainty. . . . They did not go past. She watched them, in a sort of dream, hesitate, open the gate, and enter. She must have been visible to them, for behind her a long panel of candlelight issued through the sitting-room door, and down the flagged path against the daffodils went a pale candle of reflection. Slowly, drowsily, it came to her that these two people had brought her some annunciation. . . . Before he spoke, she knew; and her heart tasted the sacrifice they were about to ask. She did not stir in any haste to gather their meaning. The calm of the dead, from which she had so recently come, preserved her.

"We have come," Stephen said, and made the spoken word imperfect and obvious.

She could not lead them into the gloomy unlit

rooms, so she turned into the sitting-room, and they followed her.

Isabel Beggary's mind curled like a scorched petal, and she said to herself, "She has a fine sense of the dramatic!"

"Look!" Annie whispered to Stephen and pointed to the candles she had stuck in the china saucers.

He looked. Awe held and prevented him from looking away. This white shell was his mother! The domination of years crystallized into its final sway. He must do her bidding. He hoped, for an instant, that Annie would be firm. He would stand by her. . . . He avoided Isabel's eyes as he spoke her name, and kept his word with her and his obedience. "Isabel and I, Annie . . . we have come to ask you . . ."

She waited, and never prompted him. There was no hurry—for this.

Isabel prompted him with a sharp "Stephen!"

" . . . To set us free?" It was best to be brutal. It was wrong, wrong, wrong, with his mother lying there, but it *was* best, and he could think of no sophistry to cloak the harsh truth of his return with Isabel. And it was best not to linger, not to whip her into interpretation. Annie was the nearest to the bed where the light cast its haloes upon the oaken posts. She was like a shadow before ghostly substance. They looked at her with a vigilance that kept time with her breathing.

"Set you free?" She said it merely to gain

time. Something in her was turning icy cold.

Isabel took up her share knowing that she would have to fight hard for him. Her clear young voice was like a song—a song in battle. "Your marriage is no marriage . . . and never will be with me between you!"

"Why need you be between us?" Annie asked, urged by neither malice nor stupidity, but by some eternal force that was as much without as within her, as much past as present. And it was not the girl alone she was asking, but immortal God. She would have given her life, in that moment, to have the power to turn him away from her doorstep on that morning of mornings when he came to crown with the laurel of his companionship the truth about Harry . . . she was out again in the yard watching saffron funnels, crying out for peace . . . the peace that had come to her was this wild cheating of the Lord's. For a moment prayer was emptied out of her soul, and faith, and every appeal to infinite mercy.

"Why should I *be*?" the girl retorted with bitter breath, and cast stern fate between them. Their eyes met. Annie's head drooped back; her lids shuttered her gray scrutiny so that the girl could not read her as she could read the girl. She was standing beside Stephen—this usurper. Her beauty had a new bloom upon it; her youth had ripened since yesterday upon woe and desolation. She had no conqueror's air, no defiance, but an earnestness that Annie knew came from no surface of the soul. It made her kind to her, stabbed

her with kindness. "I know what you are feeling." She remembered Harry's return after his first long voyage . . . the sharp secret moment of belief that she had lost his fidelity. . . .

"I expect you do." Isabel's long fingers were wrestling the button off her cape. "And having known it, one would think you would be content . . . there's never been anybody but Stephen for me . . . there never will be!"

The wound went to the depths. She looked from the girl to the dead woman, not daring to look at Stephen. And very slowly a smile came over the unearthly mask of his mother, something crossed the face and was wiped away again. Harry and she were together. . . . Annie asked them silently, her thoughts a surge of appeal, to tell her what to do. Behind the closed eyes she could hear Harry's voice—she had had her fill of love . . . every time he was a new lover . . . she could almost see the silver serpent ring on the gold-haired hand. And his mother: "He is younger than you. She is more his age. They are meant for each other—you have no right to take him." But "marriage!" she cried out in despair. And his mother smiled again and made her answer. "What is marriage but the marriage of true souls!" She came out of eternity stripped to a courage that enabled her to look at Stephen. Never, she thought, never until now had she loved him—like this, when she was losing him. Reason like a gift from God descended upon her. The Holy Ghost was her witness. "This morning you

asked me to help you . . . we agreed to . . . a sort of friendship!"

"Friendship, Annie?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, friendship!" She smiled with a queer patience upon her lips. "I suppose we couldn't keep—even that? You wouldn't let us!" she asked Isabel.

"I will give him more!" the girl protested, not catching her full meaning. And to Annie it was as though she had said, "I will give him the Kingdom of Heaven."

It was then that Stephen began to pick the books up from the table and put them down again. Isabel took the last from him and held it in her hands. She looked at Annie despairingly. And Annie wanted to cry out to them to be merciful, for they were making her their torturer. And she, whose love and pity had ever bled for the suffering, was splintered to the core of human pain by their hatred and misjudgment. She could not bear to see them. And the words would not come to her to make her renunciation clear. She had to hold her hands close against her breast to keep her sobbing heart in prison. The seconds in which nobody spoke and one of the candles sputtered were like a moment spread for some god's ravishment. . . .

Stephen was the one to break it. He flung the pile of books across the table. "Good God!" he cried, and pointed to his mother.

The ice broke then, and Annie's voice came

through, oddly tender and quiet: "Take him, Isabel . . . it is only right!" An impulse she could not fathom nor sound made her reach forward and put her arms round the girl. "There! There!" she said, and pushed her towards Stephen, who had gone over to the bed. "Comfort him!" She was at the door when Stephen called her name. She could not turn and face him. She was terrified by a wild thought that he wanted to kiss her. The idea made her frigid. He sprang away from Isabel. "Annie! Annie!"

The cry made her wait, cold on the threshold. "What is it?" His eyes were dark with mercy. "You're not . . . you mustn't go back to Number 9!"

"Ah!" She saw his poor character then caught in the mesh of protections. "Oh, that . . ." she said, and her voice was a hoarse mimic of the girl's, "I've got over *that*!" She gave him his full liberation. And there was a—a sort of laughter inside her when she thought of the truth she was building the lie upon.

"Truly?" he asked. His brows were furrowed, angry. He saw deeper than she credited. Freedom was surging in upon him, full of strength that hardened him against her suffering. The desire for Isabel was greater than any sway she could now achieve.

"Really and truly," she answered. And it seemed to her that they were children in a game —that the threshold was an arch held by Stephen and her through which Isabel was to pass and

stand by Stephen . . . oranges and lemons . . . grief welled up again, dark, hidden, rusty with old longing . . . thieves they were, all of them . . . snatching at something that could not be shared. Life was this—robbery. She looked from Stephen to Isabel, blinded by a pity that separated her from them, from all the world that had not this hot heart-break of denial. "I hope you will be happy . . . make the most of it." She was afraid. Even for them she was afraid. She rushed away then into the unlit passage. She was never quite sure if her cry, "Don't follow me!" ever reached her lips. Nothing followed her except the shaft of light from the open door. . . . Inside there, he would be casting away every thought about her. . . . She remembered that she had hung her hat and her coat, with her gloves stuffed into the pocket, on the pegs outside the kitchen door. But in the darkness and the confusion of her mind she could not find them. It was Stephen's hat her hand brought down. The leather lining-band touched her fingers. She kissed it with dry, shut lips—Good-bye! Good-bye! And over it, above the orb of darkness she saw Isabel's face with that shy lit look upon it that nobody had any right to look upon except Stephen. She had looked away instantly—taking an instant's worth of the rapture. It was her sole reward—a younger woman's joy. Against every regret that might rise to plague her she could recall—just this, she could bring it again and again in payment until her own appeasement should be

attained . . . when she was old, and lonely, and forgotten. Stephen hadn't showed her anything that belonged to Isabel. His face wore a newness that was like anger yet couldn't be anger. He knew too much. She felt—narrowed, folded into an isolation that was as a vault upon every desire . . . she found her coat then, and put it on shivering. . . .

In the street, the street of Rising Slepe, as she walked quickly past the twinkling shop-windows an absurd notion besieged her that she had put on her hat back to front. Not that it mattered, for it was one of those that had an equal amount of brim all round. But the notion vexed her to distraction. It made her stop at the chemist's to look at herself in the strip of advertisement mirror above the door-handle. There was something ridiculous in the strained stare of her face with the gold red-edged letters of the peppermint dentifrice sprawled across it. It startled her—like the time she opened the door, close upon the starved white face of the carol-singer. . . . "You poor fool" she cried out upon the distorted image, and went on.

She was dazed. She hardly knew what she was doing. The bus, the train, the swiftness of her own footsteps, were as motions in which she was arrested, static, as some poor cause swept hard by reasons that were bound to defeat it. Everything, people, appeared strangely real as if—as if she had never quite seen people and objects clearly before. It made her able to read them—

clairvoyant . . . the mouth of the man in the railway carriage molded over his long teeth told her somehow that he had yielded up rebellion to the point when the slave takes shelter in his master's right of cruelty . . . a clerk he was, or something like that, spinning himself out in the minutest duties . . . and that woman rapped in the lovely furs, with the dyed hair and tired, childish eyes... you had to feel sorry for her. When she said, "Do you mind if I shut the window?" there was something pathetic about it, about her, underneath the smile, the easy graciousness that was only a polish upon the real, unsatisfied woman. They were all stranded together . . . the night whizzed past them like a black sleety wind. They were looking out through a dim glass upon the vortex. The noise buzzed in one's ears, screaming, "Don't think! don't think!" But one thought harder than ever. The thoughts leaped about, jerked, snatched at every hint of silence and hurried, hurried. She kept her hands clenched together . . . nobody knew how she was fighting, fighting, trying to give up, to yield—like the man opposite, and accept the real life that was so tormented by what she wanted to make of it.

And even Lenne was different—cold and night-stricken. People's eyes avoided her. It made her wonder where she belonged to, where she ought to go . . . nobody wanted her. She made straight for Saint Dukas' as if she were following a cry, a homing. But Saint Dukas' was shut. It was so late. She knew it would be shut. And

yet it was as though God, like mankind, had turned His face away. She went along the church railings gropingly, not with her hands, but with her senses. The bank down to the river was flecked with white littered papers; the sky was littered with stars. Everywhere, some old use was strewn and laid waste . . . she belonged to the waste . . . the tide was out and a dark strip of water lay ambushed in the land. For one insane moment she stood away from herself and saw her body, the husk of her life, lying there in the bedded mud over which the tidal waters came and went . . . men would find her, rough men with pity for her hewn out of the roughness—the sort of pity one gave to a dog. A slow, grave bitterness pervaded her and made her look away, upward, to where the spire of Saint Dukas' was a tower. Clouds paraded there in that dark heaven, like thoughts in sorrow, unlit and unbearing. . . . And dipping, hardly knowing, into the grief of the world, her mind went in by the little gate of Gethsemane and reached a cairn, a pinnacle of pain, like the heap of stones before which Christ was prostrated on the eve of sacrifice. She saw Him now, in the picture, His face holy and glorious with sorrow . . . to give—for others! To give for others! . . . It was disobedient she was. She wanted a victory that was no victory at all, but a wickedness before God and an insult to Harry. She bowed her head for a moment, and when she raised her eyes again the world she knew had steadied again into its place.

This was Lenne, where her home was—in the house she had shared with Harry. Why was she wandering about at this hour of the night? Just because the strange young man who had come to lodge with her loved a younger woman and could not stay with her! Harry was dead! . . . She too would come to die and find him . . . there. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

SHE was very tired, utterly worn out, wearied. Surely, when this day was done she would sleep. She had stayed up all night, cleaning and scrubbing and polishing in a perfect fury of endeavor. . . . "One would think the king and the whole Royal Family were coming to visit me!" she thought, and her mouth showed a wraith-like smile. The place was clean again . . . there was only the back-bedroom . . . she would go in there after she had made a cup of tea and pack his things. Everything that belonged to him she had taken out of the little sitting-room and placed in a pile on the landing outside his bedroom door. She stood, thinking wearily of these trivialities. The kitchen was very peaceful. Outside, there was no sun, the separating yards were in shadow. The chestnut tree was like a Christmas tree hung out of time, its candles unlit. The quiet spring air was tense, snapped here and there with quivering bird-notes. She watched the flight of sparrows across the clothesline; her eyes dwelt upon the bright blaze of bursting yellow in the window-box. These things were still there to delight the heart, no matter how sad the heart might be. Sadness made the delight more wonderful—more lovable. She smiled to herself as though to

a companion. Soon I'll be one of those lonely creatures who go to the public park with bread-crumbs in their pockets! She saw herself . . . with a little paper bag . . .

And then a calm enveloped her that was as terrible as death. It made the very act of being into a charnel. Desire, and hope, and godly petition were consumed and perished. The future would merely open doors and shut them, let nothing in, let nothing out. The baker would come, the baker would go; she would clean knives and use them again; fill saucepans and empty them . . . clean and clean in a succession of cleanings that would be as regular as the moon in its courses, and as whitened out of all feeling as that pale disc above the night. Harry! She could never again think of Harry with a memory that would be innocent as well as passionate. That was Stephen's injury —he had stripped her of the power of decent mourning . . . she was not only bereaved, but turned into a penitent. Every glance she would bestow upon her dead would spring a shoot of pleading, of guilt, as well as proof . . . and yet with Harry there was no need for argument. She had never probed nor argued about his girls! But, then, she had never come face to face with them. Her trust, the trust she had spent lavishly upon his living self, came back and gave her certainty in the worth of his spirit. He would not misjudge. You could never blame a human being for love! The girl next door came out and went dashing down the yard, bawling some mad dis-

harmony. She was young, the girl, young, young, young, brazen with youth that did not know. One grew older. Age was nothing but this gathering, this harvesting, this humiliation. The wisdom of the psalms, she tried to remember . . . looking out through darkened windows . . . one shall rise up at the voice of a bird . . . the daughters of music shall be brought low. . . . She was one of them, watching the blossoming tree . . . the grasshopper shall be a burden and the caperberry shall fail. Well, all these things had come to pass upon her. Everything was a symbol. You could pick out the likeness over and over again. One traveled slowly after all; it took years and years to understand. A numb feeling like patience stirred into her calm, a breath warmed her. She felt sorry for the girl, sorry for the chestnut tree, because they were such simple manifestations of existence. She felt very old and wise beholding them. When she was simple as that tree, courageous as that untried girl, Harry's love had come to her . . . the sweet, sweet revelation of the miracle of being . . . how foolish she was to wring her hands as though Stephen Host had thieved all splendor from her. She had only to think, to remember, and life turned into a treasure-house—ready to fill the lap of every day she could bring to it. She could go back and back, and forward—forward even to Stephen, and instead of bereavement, was she not as rich as a woman had any right to be to have known love and the embraces of love? All that

Harry had brought into her life—the exquisite anguish of dreams emptied in fulfilment, of meeting and parting . . . and those traveler gleams that brought her into her own touch with foreign places . . . the house was full of souvenirs that made her the envy of the neighbors . . . to think that the thought had ever entered her head of deserting these things—Harry's things! She looked round the kitchen affectionately, her eyes clinging like hands at a sanctuary. The dear, plain place!

The kettle began to purr. When she regarded it, it seemed for a moment that it was winking; it was the way the lid went up and down, like checks upon the purrs. It never sang aloud like other kettles; its speech was this soft pussy-like bubbling of the heart of effort. She went over to it, pushed the lid down with her forefinger, and lifted it on to the trivet. "Oh, you silly old thing!" she said whisperingly, "reminding me about the tea!" She reached up for the tea-caddy—the old Potiphar lodge canister with the foxy heads on it.

And while her hand was up she heard something—a sound that frightened her—in the hall. . . . Oh, it couldn't be! it couldn't . . . he had his key. She stood quite still, telling herself that it was next door. The window was shut; it made her hear the next-door noises. She looked at it distractedly. The window was open.

"Annie!"

Why, why, why had he come? He might have trusted her to send his belongings.

"Annie!"

He was there, in the doorway, smiling, yes, but . . . even in the short look she strung herself to give him, she saw that he was different. . . .

"I thought I'd come along and pack . . . get it over . . . my things would be rather a nuisance. . . ."

"No," she began trepidantly, and remembered the pile on the landing that he would find. . . . "I was going to send them."

Their eyes met. His were utterly unflinching. It was she who looked away. "I say, Annie, you've been splendid. I . . . we . . . we both feel like worshiping you."

"Worshiping," she repeated. His manner was a dagger, a danger, a menace; it made her want to fight—to keep him. . . . No, no, no! She didn't want him . . . if only—if only she could hurt him, make him feel—anything but this exulting happiness. He had no right to show such happiness to her. Did he think she was a stone? "I don't want your worship. . . ." Her voice sounded stubborn.

"Of course you don't. . . . I only wanted to tell you. . . ." He was urged to proof, to make her realize that he indeed knew the whole worth of her action. Her expression brought him into the full meaning of her presence, brought him back to her from Isabel's realm—to see her side, to see herself as she actually was. It was devilish rough on her, devilish rough on Isabel. God! What a mess he'd made! Isabel's bright hope-

fulness rose like a banner above the puzzle. "It's hard lines, Annie, for you—for all of us. . . ."

She did not think of herself at all as she said slowly, looking at him with a sort of dull energy, "I am still your wife!"

Wife! Wife! He laughed at her beneath his silence. She would never be that. What did she mean—release? "Do you want . . ."

"I want nothing," she interrupted.

The way she said it recalled his mother. Her voice damped him. And then Isabel's profile, Isabel's lips . . . planning . . . planning . . . He put his hat down on the table and kept his hand on it, his finger playing with the brim. "That's it, Annie. What can we do?" He thought of divorce, vaguely, as a thing associated with trickery of some sort, put the idea away and looked across at her with frank, wilful eyes. "We . . . Isabel wants me to go East. . . . I told her I wanted to . . . it's best for us to get away into an entirely new environment. There'll be a little sum after the sale, but not much. We'll have to work hard . . . don't you think it's a good plan?"

It struck her as ridiculous, like overheard laughter, that he should be telling her his plans, consulting her as though—as though she were his mother.

Her expression was inscrutable. She might have been an enemy. He wasn't sure whether she meant to be an enemy.

Perhaps she did! Behind him, on the dresser,

was the gap left by Harry's books, which she had restored to their shelf in the parlor . . . the months in which she had known him receded . . . she had accepted the truth about Harry. She knew now beyond all fear of telling. He was dead—waiting for her at her end of the journey. She had to travel down the years—to him, through days that might be as dark waters, but beyond which she would find him . . . his mother-of-pearly hands would hold out the fish to her, live, wriggling fish, like playthings, and she would look up at him as she had looked that first time in the sunset. . . . "Stephen," she said, and her voice was lifted by surprise. He, who belonged to the girl Isabel, was sitting there as if the house were his.

"Yes."

"It's finished . . . all that between us."

He rose. "Yes, I know, it's best. . . . I'll go and pack." He was at the door, nearly on the stairs, when her cry recalled him.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather . . . I'd rather you . . . you didn't. I'll pack. I'll send them off immediately!"

The will mustered into the level of her voice restrained him, compelled his obedience. He watched her dart to the dresser. Her slippers made a lapping sound across the tiled oilcloth. She put a hand behind the plates and brought out a book.

"There's this . . ." She held it out to him.

"One of my books! There are lots more, I'm afraid!" He laughed.

"Yes, yes! But this, I was going to beg you to let me keep it!"

"Do keep it!" he cried out, and tried to think of something else to give her—for remembrance. He wanted, absurdly, to—to reward her.

"No! Take it! I don't want it now. Take it!" She thrust it into his hand. It was the copy of *Jason*. "I wanted it . . . and now I don't want it."

"But do . . ."

She was smiling at him commiseratingly as though he were a fool. She was unbearable, unfathomable, like that. She was a mystery to him. She always had been. "Thank you. . . . It's good of you to trouble about my things. . . . I'm sorry . . ." He wanted to get it over, to get out. But her queer dreamy eyes were holding him. And then, almost as though she impelled him, he was walking through the hall. On the doorstep he breathed free again. Horns were hooting from the Victoria Docks. He looked in their direction smilingly, and a vision came into his heart of the sea . . . the ocher-colored East spattered with ripe color . . . and Isabel's lovely companionship. . . . He straightened his shoulders. He was going to live . . . Her hand on his brought him back.

"Good-bye, Stephen, good-bye. Be good to—your girl. I hope you will be happy. I will al-

ways think of you—both—as happy, happy. . ."

It made him stammer. She was amazingly generous. God! She was a saint for decency! "I wish you were going to be happy. . . ."

Her lips made a hushing prelude. "Don't mind me!" There was no hint of martyrdom in the words, but something that was the full brother of passion. "I . . . I am here. . . ." Over his head, she saw the crown of the Western Gate make a faint arch in the sky of noon . . . the eternal clouds were marching by, marching, marching. . . .

"Good-bye."

She thought of the morning he had first come. It was like that. He was going away. She couldn't have him. She couldn't have him. She shut the door. Inside, she crushed her hands against her breast. Salvation flooded her eyes, made her lips devout. "Harry!" she whispered. And the name swung, an orison, into the stillness—the stillness of the house, the stillness of her own soul.

THE END

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WOODLAND : CALIFORNIA

DEALING with a tense and fundamental situation rich with possibilities of psychological drama, the author here presents to us with exceptional power and subtlety the experiences and inner conflict of a passionate woman whose sailor husband has been given up for lost.

Kathleen Coyle is well acquainted with those strange hidden currents of desire which motivate our behavior; her style is piquant; her prose exquisite. But it is above all the fine, generous personality of her heroine which makes the absorbing interest of this novel. She, Anne Capgrave, brings the breadth, freedom and romance of the sea she has always known into the lives of two people, and it is she who gives to the story the unmistakable dignity of that largest human drama of all—a great love.